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IN SILK ATTIRE.

VOL. I.

IN SILK ATTIRE.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,
AUTHOR OF "LOVE OR MARRIAGE?"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1869.

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250. w. 36.

LONDON:
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

"And ye shall walk in silk attire,
And siller ha'e to spare,
Gin ye'll consent to be his bride,
Nor think o' Donald mair.

Oh, wha wad buy a silken gown,
Wi' a puir broken heart?
Or what's to me a siller crown,
Gin frae my love I part?"

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IN SILK ATTIRE.

CHAPTER I.

OVER, AND SAFE.

"I AM gathering myself together for a great leap, Jack."

"Don't look so sad about it, then. Take it as you would one of your Berkshire fences, Harry, with a firm seat and a cool hand."

"If I only knew what was on the other side, Jack—that bothers me."

"By the way, did you hear of the dinner at old Thornhill's on Tuesday? I declare everybody was drunk but the dogs; and they were turned out at night to find their way home by themselves. The Squire got

very, very bad—port and brandy alternately —tumbled twice off his horse before he got out of the gate; and then, half an hour after, when the rest of us rode home, we found him sitting in the middle of the road, in the dark, trying to ward off the dogs that had gathered round him and were for licking his face, while he hiccuped to them 'G—go away, my good people—g—go away—I've really nothing for you; 'pon my soul, I've forgot my p—purse.' But what's the matter, Harry? You haven't heard a word of my story; and you're looking as glum as a parson."

"Jack, I'm going to marry."

"Don't be a fool."

"I am, though. It's all over with me, Jack. I told you I was gathering myself together for a great leap."

"Who is it, Harry?"

"Annie Napier."

There was an interval of dead silence. Mr. John Palk was too prudent a man to hazard a hasty witticism, knowing as he did the somewhat fiery temperament of Harry Ormond, Marquis of Knottingley.

"Do you mean that, Harry?"

"I do."

"You're in luck, then, lad. But what a host of rivals you'll have blaspheming you! Why, all London is at Miss Napier's feet. Lord Sotheby and I went to see her last night—the people in the pit were half crazy about her. And when we went round to Millington House for some supper, Sotheby swore he'd give his soul to the devil for a hundred years to get an introduction to Annie—I beg your pardon, to Miss Napier."

"Fellows like Sotheby are rather free in offering their soul to the devil," said Harry Ormond, with a sneer, "because it is the

thing of least value they have about them; and because they know the devil will have it for nothing by-and-bye."

"If you marry Miss Napier, Harry, you'll be killed in a month. I tell you, man, London wont stand it. Why, they say that the Prince himself——"

Ormond started to his feet—his face scarlet, his eyes hot and angry.

"By God, I will drive a sword through the man who breathes that lie in my hearing!"

"Don't scowl at me, Harry. I don't believe it."

"Do I care a straw who believes it? But we needn't waste angry words, Jack. I have known Annie Napier for years; and our family has been rather celebrated for its jealousy. If I, an Ormond, marry that girl —people may conclude that there will be no longer a market for their scandalous wares.

And mind you, Jack—don't you talk of it to any living soul; for I haven't even asked her yet; but she, or nobody, will be my wife."

John Palk went home to order supper for a little party of card-players who were to meet at his house that night; and Harry Ormond had promised to call in during the evening—that is, the card-playing evening, which began when the men got home from the theatre.

Ormond was himself at the theatre that evening. From his box he sent round the following note to the lady who, at that time, held London captive with the fascination of her genius and her personal loveliness.

"DEAREST ANNIE,—I shall await your coming home. I have something particular to say to my little sister. "H. O."

He was alone in the box; and he sate there, alternately entranced by the sweet tones of the voice he loved, and enraged by the thought that all this houseful of people were sharing a satisfaction which by right belonged to him alone. When they applauded—as they did often and vehemently, for Miss Napier was the idol of the time—he scowled at them as though they were insulting the woman whom he hoped to make his wife. He resented their rude staring as an indignity visited upon himself; and when, at the end of the act, they turned and talked to each other about the great actress, his family passion drew dark meanings from their smiles and whispered conversations, and his heart burned within him. A night at the theatre was not a pleasure to Harry Ormond. He left so maddened by love and jealousy that he became a joke to his companions—behind his back, be it understood, for he had

a quick temper and a sure eye with which the wits did not care to trifle. Harry Ormond was not a man to be provoked or thwarted lightly; and in this period of contrariety, disquietude, and gusty passion which falls, in some measure or other, to the lot of most young men, a discreet avoidance of irritating topics was the course which wisdom dictated to Lord Knottingley's friends. Not that he was a sullen boor or bravo, eager to tread on any man's corns, and kill him for swearing. He was naturally light-hearted, fickle, generous; impulsive in every mood of affection or dislike; and, at this time, when these uncomfortable love-measles were strong upon him, he as often quarrelled with himself as with his neighbours. He was sensitive and proud; he was naturally jealous; his sweetheart, worse luck, was an actress; and it was a time, as some of us can remember,

when scandal was cultivated as an art. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Harry Ormond suffered all the tortures, while enjoying few of the amenities of love.

That night he was sitting in Miss Napier's house alone and moody. He had an uneasy feeling that the strength of his passion was forcing him to a step from which his calmer reason might otherwise have caused him to shrink. He had not sufficient self-criticism to know that his impulsiveness, under these circumstances, might hereafter beget all the mutual miseries of inconstancy; and yet there were vague forebodings in his mind. He crossed the room, which was very prettily furnished and brilliantly lit, and leaning his arms on the mantel-piece, proceeded to study a small and daintily-executed miniature which hung against the wall. Was he trying to trace in these calm and beautiful

features his own destiny; or was he wondering how his passion might alter the future of her whom he loved so much; or was he bitterly thinking that this portrait, like the original, was but a thing at which all men might gaze as well as he?

At that moment the door was opened, and there entered the actress herself, flushed with the evening's triumph, and smiling a happy welcome to her friend. That first glimpse of her sweet face settled the matter —there was no more doubt, no more regret, possible. And as it was not in the nature of the man to prepare his utterances, or use any discretion in choosing them, he at once went forward, took her hands in his, and looking into her face with a sad earnestness, uttered his complaint and prayer.

"Annie, I cannot bear your going upon the stage any longer. It is a monstrous thing—a degradation—I will not have it.

Listen to me, Annie, for your own dear sake; and tell me you will never go back to the theatre any more. You are my little sister, are you not? and you will do what is best for yourself and me, my dearest? How can I bear to hear the women talk of you—how can I bear to see the men stare at you—and such men and such women, Annie! You do not know what they say and think of actresses; but not of you, Annie! I did not mean that—and so I beseech you, darling, to do what I ask you; will you not?"

Her eyes fell.

"And what would you have me do *afterwards?*" she asked in a low voice.

"Be my wife, Annie; there, I have told you! Look in my face, my dearest. You know I have loved you always; trust me now."

"Trust you!" she said looking up with

wet eyes; "you know I trust you, Harry. Whom should I trust but you?"

"And you say ——?"

"I say I will do anything for you, Harry, except that—anything except that," she said with a white, downcast face and trembling lips. "You have been too good to me, Harry; you have given me too much of your love and your kindness, for me to let you do such a thing. It is for your sake only I refuse. You remember when you said you would always be a brother to me; and I was thankful within my heart to hear you say that; and after having been my dear brother and my friend for all this time, do you think I would make such a poor return for all your love as to let you marry—an actress? I will leave the stage if it will please you; I will lie down in my grave, if it will please you, and be happy enough if I knew you

wished it. I will do anything for you, Harry; but not that—not that!"

Wherewith he caught her in his arms, and kissed her—passionately, despairingly.

"My angel, my dearest, are you mad to talk in that way? Do you not see that the great favour would fall upon me only? Is there a woman in all England to be compared with you, my queen, my darling? What matters your being an actress to me? It is you, not the actress, whom I beg for a wife; and if you would see in what way I should ask you for so great a blessing—here at your feet I kneel, you an empress, and I your slave."

And so he knelt down before her, and took her hand and looked up into her eyes. That may have been the fashion in which lovers spoke in those days, or it may be that the strong passion of the young man thrilled him into using stage language.

But there could be no doubt about the absolute sincerity of the words; and the girl, with a sort of sad, wistful pleasure in her face, heard his urgent prayer.

"See, Annie, am I low enough? For God's sake do not mock me by saying you cannot be my wife because you are an actress. You are to me the noblest and tenderest of women; and there is nothing I hope for but your love. What do you say, Annie? Will you not speak a word to me?"

She stooped down and gently kissed away the tears from his cheeks.

"I am ashamed of your goodness, dear," she said in her low, intense voice, "and I wish you had not asked me. But oh! Harry, Harry, how can I hide that I love you with my whole heart!"

She placed her hand on his soft brown hair—that hand which half London would

have died to have kissed—and looked for a moment into his love-stricken eyes. In that brief moment the compact was sealed between them, and they were thenceforth husband and wife. She uttered a few words—rather indistinctly, to be sure—of farewell; and then she lightly kissed his forehead, and left the room.

He rose, bewildered, pale, and full of an indescribable happiness; and then he went downstairs, and out into the open air. There was a light in her bedroom as he turned and looked up; and he said,—

"I leave my heart in her dear keeping, for good or ill."

Shortly afterwards he made his appearance in Mr. John Palk's rooms; and by that time there was nothing on his face but a happy, audacious trust in the future; an expression which immediately struck one of his friends who was seated at one of the small tables.

"Harry Ormond, come here," said this gentleman. "I see you bring good luck in your face. Back me!"

"I will, Wriothesly. A hundred guineas on Lord Wriothesly's next hand!"

"Done with you, Harry," said Mr. John Palk; to whom a hundred guineas was an acceptable sum, now that he had managed, by aid of ace, king, and queen (with occasional help from a racing favourite) to scatter one of the finest estates possessed by any private gentleman in England.

As it happened, too, Lord Wriothesly and his partner won; and Mr. Palk made a little grimace. At a sign from Ormond, he followed the young marquis into a corner, where their conversation could not be overheard.

"You'll have to take paper, Harry," said Palk.

"What do you mean?"

"The hundred guineas ——"

"Confound your hundred guineas! Sit down, and listen to me. I am an expatriated man."

"How?" said Mr. Palk, quietly taking a chair.

"Miss Napier is going to be my wife; and I know she will never have the courage to confront my friends—rather, I should say, I shall never allow her to sue in any way for recognition from them. You see? Then I shouldn't like to have my wife brought face to face with people who have paid to see her; and so—and so, Jack, I am going to give up England."

"You are paying a long price for wedded happiness, Harry."

"There I differ with you, Jack. Now I want you to help me in getting up a quiet little wedding down in Berks; for I know she will never consent to meeting

my relatives and all the riff-raff of my acquaintances ——"

"Thank you, Harry."

"And I am sure she will be glad to leave the stage at once, if that is possible."

"What a pace you have! You're at the end of everything when other people are thinking of the beginning. But, in good faith, Harry, you are to be congratulated; and you may rely on my services and secrecy to the last."

And to Harry Ormond it seemed as if all the air around him were full of music.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOOK BACK.

HOW still the lake lay, under the fierce heat! The intense blue of it stretched out and over to the opposite shore, and there lost itself in the soft green reflection of the land; while the only interruption of the perfect surface was a great belt of ruffled light stirred by the wind underneath the promontory of Spiez. Then overhead the misty purple mass of the Niessen; and beyond that again the snowy peaks of the Schreckhorn, Mönch, and Jungfrau glimmering through the faint and luminous haze of the sunlight; and over these the serene

blue of a Swiss sky. Down in front of the house, the lake narrowed to the sharp point at which it breaks suddenly away into the rapid, surging, green-white waters of the Aar; and at this moment, as seen from the open window, two men in a low flat boat were vainly endeavouring to make head against the powerful current.

At the window sate a little girl of about four years old, with large, dark grey eyes, a bright, clear face, and magnificent jet-black curls; a doll-looking little thing, perhaps, but for the unusual depth and meaning of those soft, large eyes. All at once she put her elbows on a tiny card-table opposite her, clasped her hands, and said, with a piteous intonation,—

"Nu, Nu; oh, I don't know what to do!"

Her father, who had been lying silent and listless on a couch in the shadow of the

room, looked up and asked her what was the matter.

"My doll is lying out in the sun," she said, in accents of comic despair, "and the poor thing must be getting a headache, and I am not allowed, Nu says, to go out just now."

"What a little actress she is!" her father muttered, as he returned, with a slight laugh, to his day-dreaming.

And she *was* an actress—every atom of her. She had not the least self-consciousness; the assuming of appropriate speech and gesture was to her more natural than the bashful sense of personality with which most children are burdened. A true actress will smile quite naturally into the Polyphemus-eye of a camera; a false actress will be conscious of deceit even in dressing herself to have her portrait taken. This child of four had the self-abandonment of genius

in her mimetic efforts. She coaxed her mother and wheedled her father with an artless art which was quite apparent; and her power of copying the tender phrases she heard used was only equalled by the dramatic manner in which she delivered them. The appeal to "Nu"—which was a contraction for "nurse"—was her invariable method of expressing intense despair. If her mamma reprimanded her; if she lost one of her toys; or if she merely felt out of sorts—it was all the same: down went the elbows and out came the pitiful exclamation, "Oh, Nu, Nu, I don't know what to do." This little girl was the daughter of the Marquis of Knottingley, who now lay upon the couch over there; and it is of her that the present history purposes to speak.

For Harry Ormond had been right in his surmise. The young actress begged him not to insist upon her meeting his friends

and acquaintances; and he, to whom no sacrifice was then great enough to show his gratitude for her love, readily consented to go abroad after the quiet little ceremony which took place down in Berkshire. They went to Thun and lived in this house which lay some short distance from the village, overlooking the beautiful lake; and here Lord Knottingley forgot his old world, as he was by it forgotten. His marriage was known only to a few, though it was suspected by many, and coupled with the unexpected withdrawal from the stage of Annie Napier. In the end, however, the matter dropped into oblivion, and Harry Ormond was no more thought of.

For several years they lived there a still and peaceful existence, varied only by an occasional excursion southward into Italy. The halo of his romantic passion still lingered around his young wife; and in the

calm delight of her presence he forgot old associations, old friends, old habits.

"You cannot expatriate a married man," he used to say, "for he carries with him that which makes a home for him wherever he goes."

She, too, was very happy in those days. She could never be persuaded that her husband had not made a great sacrifice in coming abroad for her sake; and she strove to repay him with all the tenderness, and gratitude, and love of a noble nature. She simply worshipped this man; not even the great affection she bore her bright-eyed quaint little daughter interfered with the one supreme passion. To her he was a miracle of all honourable and lovable qualities; never had any man been so generous, heroic, self-denying.

And yet Harry Ormond was a weak man —weak by reason of that very impulsive-

ness which often drove him into pronounced and vigorous action. As he leant back on his couch, after hearing the pathetic complaint of his little daughter, there were some such thoughts as these vaguely flitting before him.

"She will be an actress, too; a real actress, not a made one, thank God. And if I take her back to England as my child, will not all the poor, would-be actresses of my acquaintance assume a fine air of patronage towards her and her mother? But, after all, Annie *was* on the stage—I cannot deny it; and I cannot quarrel with anybody for reminding me of the fact. All the tipsy ruffians of the town have sate and stared at her—d——n them! And just as surely is it impossible that I can remain here all my life. Annie is very well, and very affectionate; but I did not bargain for a life-long banishment. And one might

as well be dead as live always out of London."

This was the first seed sown; and it grew rapidly and throve in such a mind as his. He became peevish at times; would occasionally grumble over the accidents of his present life, and then took to grumbling at that itself; sometimes held long conversations with the small Annie about England, and strove to impress her with the knowledge that everything fine and pleasant abode there; finally—and this process had been the work of only a week or two—he announced his intention of going to London on business.

His wife looked up from her work, with dismay on her face; he had never proposed such a thing before.

"Why cannot Mr. Chetwynd do that business for you also, Harry?" she asked.

"Because it is too important," he said, a little impatiently. "You need not fear so much my going to London for a fortnight."

She went over to him, and placed her hand gently on his head.

"Am I too jealous of you, Harry? I hate England because I think sometimes you have still a lingering wish to be back there. But I do not *fear* your going; I know you will be as anxious to come to me as I shall be to see you."

So Harry Ormond went forth from that house which he never saw again. His wife and daughter were at the window; the former pale and calm, the latter vaguely unhappy over an excitement and disturbance which she could not understand. As the horses started he kissed his hands to them both, tenderly as he had kissed them three minutes before on the threshold; and as the

carriage disappeared round the first turning of the road, he waved his handkerchief. Annie Napier had seen the last of her husband she was to see in this world. She came away from the window, still quite calm, but with a strange look on her pale and beautiful face; and then she sate down, and took her little girl on her knee, and put her arms round her, and drew her closely to her.

"Mamma, why do you cry?" she said, looking up into the sad, silent face.

Her mother did not speak. Was the coming shadow already hovering over her? She drew her daughter the more closely to her; and the little girl, thrown back on her usual resource for expressing her alarm, only murmured disconsolately, "Oh, Nu, Nu, I don't know what to do."

CHAPTER III.

THE MARCHIONESS.

OF what befel Harry Ormond in England —of the influences brought to bear on him, of the acquaintances and relatives who counselled him (if he did receive any counsel but from his own inclination)—his wife never knew anything. Week after week passed, and she heard nothing from England. Again and again she wrote: there was no answer. But at length there arrived at Thun his lordship's man of business, Mr. Chetwynd, who brought with him all the news for which she had sought.

She was seated at the window overlook-

ing the lake, oppressed and almost terrified by the strange shadows which the sunset was weaving among the mountains opposite. The sun had so far sunk that only the peaks of the splendid hills burned like tongues of fire; and in the deep valleys on the eastern side the thick purple darkness was giving birth to a cold grey mist which crept along in nebulous masses like the progress of a great army. Down at the opposite shore the mist got bluer and denser; and over all the lake the faint haze dulled the sombre glow caught from the lurid red above. Up there, high over the mountains, there were other mountains and valleys; and, as she looked, she thought she saw an angel, with streaming violet hair which floated away eastward, and he held to his mouth a trumpet, white as silver, which almost touched the peak of the Wetterhorn; and then the long, flowing robes of scarlet and gold became an island,

with a fringe of yellow light that dazzled her sad eyes. When she turned rapidly to see that a servant had brought her a letter, the same cloud-visions danced before her, pictured in flames upon the darkness of the room.

"Will it please your ladyship to see Mr. Chetwynd this evening or to-morrow morning?" the servant inquired.

"Did Mr. Chetwynd bring this letter?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Yes, your ladyship," said the man.

"Tell him I will see him this evening—by-and-bye—in half an hour."

Standing there, with a faint pink light streaming in upon the paper, she read these words—

"DEAR ANNIE,—Things have changed greatly since I was in England before; and my present visit seems to have brought me back again to life. It would be impossible

for me to let you know how many reflections have been suggested to me since I came here; and perhaps I ought to go on at once to the main purport of my letter. You are my wife—*legally married*—as you know; and no one can deprive you of the privileges pertaining to your rank, any more than they can deprive you of my esteem and affection. At the same time you know how *very* exclusive my friends are; and I am *convinced* that for you to seek companionship with them would only bring you *discomfort* and *vexation*. Now your own good sense, my dear, will show you that I cannot always remain away from England and allow my property to be left in the hands of agents. I see so many alterations for the worse, and so much *urgent need* for improvement, that I am certain I must remain in England for several years, if not for life. Now, my dear, I have a proposal to make which you will

think cruel at first; but which—I know well—you will afterwards regard as being the wisest thing you could do for all of us. Nobody here seems to know of our marriage; certainly none of my own family seem to take it for granted that I have a wife living; and if I were to bring you over I should have to introduce you with explanations which would be awkward to both you and me—which, indeed, would be *insulting* to you. What I desire you to do is to remain in the house you now occupy, which shall be yours; a sufficient income—to be named by yourself—will be settled upon you; and Annie will be supplied with whatever governesses and masters she requires. I hope you will see the propriety of this arrangement; and more particularly on account of one circumstance which, unfortunately, I am compelled to explain. You know I never allowed you to become friends

with any of the English people we met in Italy. The reason was simply that they, in common with my relatives, believed that you and I were not married; and could I drag you, my dear, into the ignominy of an explanation? For the same reason, I hope you will conceal your real rank in the event of your ever meeting with English people at Thun; and while I wait your answer—which I trust you will *calmly* consider—I am, whatever unhappy circumstances may divide us,

"Your loving husband,

"HARRY ORMOND."

She read this letter to the very end, and seemed not to understand it; she was only conscious of a dull sense of pain. Then she turned away from it—from its callous phrases, its weak reasoning, its obvious lies, all of which seemed a message from a stranger, not from her Harry—and acciden-

tally she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror. She saw there what recalled her to herself; for the ghastly face she beheld, tinged with the faint glow of the sunset, was terror-stricken and wild. In the next second she had banished that look; she rang the bell; and then stood erect and firm, with all the fire of her old profession tingling in her.

"Bid Mr. Chetwynd come here," she said to the servant.

In a minute or two, the door was again opened, and there entered a tall, grey-haired man, with a grave and rather kindly expression of face.

She held out the letter, and said, in a cold, clear tone,

"Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"I do, your ladyship," said he.

"And you have been sent to see what

money I should take for keeping out of the way, and not troubling his lordship? Very well——"

"I assure your ladyship——"

"You need not speak," she said, with a dignity of gesture which abashed him—which made him regard her with the half-frightened, half-admiring look she had many a time seen on the faces of the scene-shifters after one of her passionate climaxes—"I presume I am still the Marchioness of Knottingley?"

"Certainly."

"And my husband has commissioned you to receive my instructions?"

"He has, your ladyship; and if you would only allow me to explain the circumstances——"

"Mr. Chetwynd, you and I used to talk frankly with each other. I hope you will not embarrass yourself by making an apo-

logy for his lordship, when he himself has done that so admirably in this letter. Now, be good enough to attend to what I say. You will secure for me and my daughter a passage to America by the earliest vessel we can reach from here; and to-morrow morning you will accompany us on the first stage of the journey. I will take so much money from you as will land us in New York; whatever surplus there may be will be returned to Lord Knottingley."

"May I beg your ladyship to consider—to remain here until I communicate with his lordship?"

"I have considered," she said, calmly, in a tone which put an end to further remonstrance, "and I do not choose to remain in this house another day."

So Mr. Chetwynd withdrew. He saw nothing of this strangely self-possessed woman until the carriage was at the door next

morning, ready to take her from the house which she had cast for ever behind her.

When he did see her, he scarcely recognised her. She was haggard and white; her eyes were red and wild; she appeared to be utterly broken down. She was dressed in black, and so was the little girl she led by the hand. He did not know that she had spent the entire night in her daughter's room, and that it was not sleep which had occupied those long hours.

So it was that Annie Napier and her daughter arrived in America; and there she went again upon the stage, under the name of Annie Brunel, and earned a living for both of them. But the old fire had gone out; and there was not one who recognised in the actress her who had several years before been the idol of London. One message only she sent to her husband; and it was

written, immediately on her reaching New York, in these words:

"HARRY ORMOND,—I married you for your love. When you take that from me, I do not care to have anything in its place. Nor need you try to buy my silence; I shall never trouble you.

"ANNIE NAPIER."

On the receipt of that brief note, Harry Ormond had a severe fit of compunction. The freedom of his new life was strong upon him, however; and, in process of time he, like most men of his stamp, grew to have a conviction that he was not responsible for the wrong he had done. If she had wilfully relinquished the luxury he offered her, was he to blame?

Ten years afterwards, Lord Knottingley lay very sick. He was surrounded by attentive relatives, who, having affectionately

interested themselves in him during his life, naturally expected to be paid for their solicitude at his death. But at the last moment remorse struck him. As the drowning man is said to be confronted by a ghastly panorama of his whole life, so he, in these last hours, recalled the old tenderness and love of his youth, which he had so cruelly outraged. He would have sent for her then; he would have braved the ridicule and indignation which he had once so feared; but it was too late. One act of reparation was alone possible. When Harry Ormond Marquis of Knottingley died, it was found that he had left, by a will dated only a few days before his death, his whole property to his wife, of whom nobody knew anything, accompanying the bequest with such expressions of affection and penitence as sorely puzzled his lady-relatives.

Not for several months did the lawyers

who acted for the trustees discover where the missing wife had taken up her abode in America; and then an elderly gentleman waited upon the actress to break the news of her husband's death, and to invite her to become the mistress of a large property and the wearer of a proud title.

"How pleased she will be," he had said to himself, before seeing her.

Once in her presence, however, he did not so hastily judge the tender-eyed, beautiful, melancholy woman; and it was with all the delicacy he could command that he told his story, and watched its effect upon her handsome, sad face.

But these ten years of labour had not quite broken Annie Napier's spirit. Out of her grief and her tears — for she was a woman, and could not help still loving the lover of her youth—she rose with her old grandeur of manner, and refused the offer.

Not theatrically, nor angrily, but simply and definitely, so that the messenger from England, perplexed and astonished, could only beg her to think, not of herself, but of her daughter.

"My daughter," she said, perhaps rather bitterly, "will never seek, any more than myself, to go amongst those people. God knows that it is she alone whom I consider in everything I do. I have taught her to earn her own bread; and I will teach her that her only chance of happiness is to marry, if she does marry, in her own profession. You appear to be surprised, sir; but what I say to you is not the result of any hasty impulse. Have you seen her?" she added, with a touch of pride. "Have you seen her since you came over? Some years hence you may find her in England; and she will reap my old triumphs again."

"If you will only consider what you are

taking from her—the position she would hold—the——"

For an instant the large dark eyes of the actress were filled with a strange, wistful look; was she striving—as we often do strive—to anticipate the current of years, and look over the long future lying in wait for this girl of hers?

"I have considered, sir, many a year ago. She has been brought up in perfect ignorance of her birth and name; and there is no one of her associates who knows our secret. So she will remain."

This unlooked-for termination to his mission so astounded the lawyer, that he could not at first comprehend the decision of her tone.

"You will understand, madam," he said, "that professionally I have no resource but to return to England with your message. But may I not beg you to reflect? Is it

not possible that you have been moved to this decision by a—what shall I say?—a view of things which may appear natural to you in your professional life, but which is looked upon otherwise by the outside world?——"

"You think I am led astray by theatrical notions of life?" she said, with a smile. "It was my experience of your 'outside world' which made me resolve that my girl should never suffer that which I have suffered. The resolution is a very old one, sir. But supposing that I should die, would she then have this property—would it belong to her?"

"Undoubtedly, if she chooses to accept it."

After a few moments' silence, the prudent and tender mother having calculated every possibility which might affect her daughter's happiness, she said to him:

"In that case, sir, I can always provide

against her suffering want. I will give her to-day your address in England, and tell her that if at any future time I am taken from her, and if she should ever be in need, she can go to you; and then, sir, you will remember who Annie Brunel is."

"And you absolutely condemn your daughter to be an actress, when a word from you could make her an English lady——"

The woman before him drew herself up.

"When my daughter ceases to believe that an actress may be a lady, it will be time for her to apply to you for the rank she has lost."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ACTRESS.

IT was near midnight when an unusually notable and brilliant little party sate down to supper in the largest hall of an hotel in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Brilliant the meeting was, for beneath the strong lights shone the long white table with its gleaming crystal, and silver, and flowers; and notable it was in that the persons sitting there were, every one of them, marked by an obvious individualism of face and dress. They were no mere company of cultivated nothings, as like each other in brain, costume, and manner, as the wine-

glasses before them; scarcely a man or woman of them had not his or her own special character rendered apparent by this or that peculiarity of facial line or intentional adornment.

But there was one woman there—or girl, rather, for she was clearly not over twenty—whose character you could not easily catch. You might watch the expression of her eyes, listen to her bright, rapid, cheerful talk, and study her bearing towards her associates; and then confess that there was something elusive about her—she had not exhibited her real nature to you—you knew nothing of her but those superficial characteristics which were no index to the spirit underneath.

Slight in figure, and somewhat pale and dark, there was nevertheless a certain calm dignity about her features, and a stateliness in her gestures, which gave an almost

massive grandeur to her appearance. Then her magnificent black hair lay around the clear, calm face, which was rendered the more intensely spiritual by large eyes of a deep and tender grey. They were eyes, under these long eyelashes, capable of a great sadness, and yet they were not sad. There seemed to play around the beautiful, intellectual face, a bright, superficial, unconscious vivacity; and she herself appeared to take a quite infantine interest in the cheerful trivialities around her. For the rest, she was dressed in a gleaming white *moiré*, with tight sleeves which came down to her tiny wrists, and there ended in a faint line of blue; and through the great braided masses of her black hair there was wound a thick cord of twisted silver, which also had a thread of blue cunningly interwoven with it. The artistic possibilities of her fine face and complexion were made the most of; for she

was an artist, one of the few true artists who have been seen upon our modern stage.

This was Miss Annie Brunel, who in three months from the date of her arrival in this country, had won the heart of London. The young American actress, with her slight and nervous *physique*, her beautiful head, and the dark lustre of her eyes, was photographed, lithographed, and written about everywhere: people went and wept covertly beneath the spell of her voice; for once unanimity prevailed among all the critics who were worth attention, and they said that the new actress was a woman of genius. Who could doubt it that had witnessed the utter self-abandonment of her impersonations? She did not come upon the stage with a thought about her jewellery, a consciousness of her splendid hair, and an eye to the critical corner of the stalls. On the stage, she was no longer mistress of

herself. Her eyes deepened until they were almost black; her face was stirred with the white light of passion; and her words were instinct with the tenderness which thrills a theatre to its core. When the sudden intensity died down, when she resumed her ordinary speech and dress, she seemed to have come out of a trance. Not a trace remained of that fire and those intonations, which were the result of unconscious creation; her eyes resumed their serene, happy indifference, her face its pleased, child-like expression. Swift, active, dexterous she was, full of all sorts of genial and merry activities; that kindling of the eye and tremor of the voice belonged to the dream-life she led elsewhere.

The supper was rather a nondescript affair, resembling the little entertainment sometimes given by an author on the production of his new piece. As the play,

however, in which Miss Brunel had just appeared was "Romeo and Juliet," there was a little difficulty about the author's being present to perform the ordinary duties; and so the manager's very good friend, the Graf von Schönstein, had stepped in and offered to play the part of host on the occasion.

The Graf indeed occupied the chair—a large and corpulent man, with a broad, fair face, small blue eyes, red hands, a frilled shirt, flowered waistcoat, and much jewellery. He had made the acquaintance of Miss Brunel during the previous year in America, and lost no time in renewing it now that she had so suddenly become famous in England. Of the Graf, who it may be mentioned was once a respectable tea-broker in Thames Street, E.C., we shall hear more.

On the left of the chairman sate the

manager, a middle-aged man, with grey hair and a melancholy face; on the right Miss Brunel, and next to her a young man of the name of Will Anerley, a friend of Count Schönstein. Then followed several members of the company, an elderly little woman who officiated as Miss Brunel's guardian, two or three critics, and a young man who spoke to nobody, but kept his eyes intently fixed upon a charming *soubrette* (with whom he had quarrelled some days before) who was wickedly flirting with Mercutio. There was no lack of jest and talk down both sides of the table, for the wine glasses were kept well filled; and occasionally there rang out, clear and full, the mellifluous laughter of the Nurse—a stout, big, red-faced woman, who had a habit of using her pocket handkerchief where a table-napkin might have been more appropriate—as she cracked her small jokes with

Benvolio, who sate opposite to her. Then Friar Lawrence, who had thrown aside his robe and become comic, happened to jolt a little champagne into Lady Capulet's lap; and the angrier she grew over his carelessness, the more did the people laugh, until she herself burst out with a big, good-natured guffaw.

Meanwhile the small clique at the upper end of the table was engaged in a conversation by itself, Count Schönstein appealing to the manager vehemently:

"Was I not right in begging you to give the public Miss Brunel's 'Juliet'? There never was such a triumph, Miss Brunel; I assure you, you have taken London by storm. And with the public satisfied, will the critics object? You will not see a dissentient voice in the papers on Monday morning. What do you say to that, Mr. Helstone?"

The man whom he addressed had forsaken the cluster of his brother critics, and was busily engaged in amusing the pretty *soubrette*, whom he had entirely drawn away from poor Mercutio.

"Why," he said with a faint smile, apparently bent upon puzzling the gorgeous-looking gentleman who had imprudently interrupted him," I should be sorry to see such unanimity, for Miss Brunel's sake. Conscientious journalism, like every conscientious journalist, knows that there are two sides to every question, and will do its best to write on both. The odds will be the truth."

"Do you mean to tell me," asked the Count somewhat pompously, "that you have no more conscience than to advocate different things in different papers?"

"If I write what I know on one side of a subject in one paper, and write up the other side in another paper, I free myself

from a charge of suppressing truth; and I ——"

Whereupon the *soubrette* with the brown curls and the wicked blue eyes, pulled his sleeve and made him upset a claret glass.

"What a clumsy creature you are," she whispered. "And what is the use of talking to that ridiculous old fool? Tell me, do you think Miss Brunel handsome?"

"I think she has the face of a woman of genius," he said with a glance of genuine admiration.

"Bah! that means nothing. Don't you think she shows her teeth on purpose when she laughs? and then those big soft eyes make her look like a baby, or like a sleepy Juno. Why do you grin so? I suppose I am not as handsome as she is; but I wonder if she could put on my gloves and boots?"

"You have adorable hands and feet, Miss Featherstone; everybody allows that."

"Thank you. They say that every ugly woman has pretty hands and feet."

"Nature leaves no creature absolutely unprotected, my dear. Let me give you some Vanilla cream."

"You are a brute. I hate you."

"I have generally found that when a young lady says she hates you, she means she loves you—if you have a good income."

"I have generally found that when a young lady rejects her suitor because of his want of brain, he instantly says she cast him off because of his want of money. But I wish you'd keep quiet, and let me hear what Mr. Melton is saying about next week. If he thinks I'll play the people in with a farce, as well as play in the burlesque, he is mistaken. However, since you people

have taken to write up Miss Brunel, she will order everything; and if the poor dear thinks seven too soon for her nerves after tea, I suppose she will get played whatever she wants."

"Spiteful thing! You're thinking of her handsome face and eyes and hair: why don't you look in the mirror and calm yourself?"

The little group at the head of the table had now split itself into two sections; and while Count Schönstein talked almost exclusively to Mr. Melton, Miss Brunel was engaged in what was apparently an interesting conversation with Will Anerley, who sate next her. But a patient observer would have noticed that the stout and pompous Graf kept his eyes pretty well fixed upon the pair on his right; and that he did not seem wholly pleased by the amused look which was on Miss Brunel's face as she

spoke, in rather a low tone, to her companion.

"You confess you are disappointed with me. That is quite natural; but tell me how I differ from what you expected me to be."

She turned her large, lustrous eyes upon him; and there was a faint smile on her face.

"Well," he said, "on the stage you are so unlike any one I ever saw that I did not expect to find you in private life—like any one else, in fact."

"Do you mean that I am like the young ladies you would expect to find in your friends' house, if you were asked to go and meet some strangers?"

"Precisely."

"You are too kind," she said, looking down. "I have always been taught, and I know, that private people and professional people are separated by the greatest diffe-

rences of character and habits; and that if I went amongst those young ladies of whom you speak, I should feel like some dreadfully wicked person who had got into heaven by mistake and was very uncomfortable. Have you any sisters?"

"One. Well, she is not my sister, but a distant relation who has been brought up in my father's house as if she were my sister."

"Am I like her?"

"No. I mean, you are not like her in appearance; but in manner, and in what you think, and so forth, you would find her as like yourself as possible. I cannot understand your strange notion that some unaccountable barrier exists between you and other people."

"That is because you have never lived a professional life," she said. "I know, myself, that there is the greatest difference between me now and when I am in one of my parts.

Then I am almost unconscious of myself—I scarcely know what I'm doing; and now I should like to go on sitting like this, making fun with you or with anybody, or amusing myself in any way. Do you know, I fancy nothing would give me so much delight as battledore and shuttlecock if I might have it in my own house; but I am afraid to propose such a thing to my guardian, Mrs. Christmas, or she would think I was mad. Did you never wish you were ten years old again, that you might get some fun without being laughed at?"

"I used constantly to go bird's-nesting in Russia, when we were too lazy to go on a regular shooting-party, and never enjoyed anything half so much. And you know cricket has been made a manly game in order to let men think themselves boys for an hour or two."

"I should like you to become acquainted

with my dear old Christmas—do you see her down there?—and then you would know how a professional life alters one. It was she, not my dear mother, who taught me all the gestures, positions, and elocution which are the raw material we actresses use to deceive you. How she scolds me when I do anything that differs from her prescriptions; and, indeed, she cannot understand how one, in the hurry of a part, should abandon one's-self to chance, and forget the ordinary 'business.' Now the poor old creature has to content herself with a little delicate compliment or two instead of the applause of the pit; and I am sometimes put to my wits' end to say something kind to her, being her only audience. Wont you come and help me some afternoon?"

The unconscious audacity of the proposal, so quietly and so simply expressed, staggered the young man; and he could

only manage to mention something about the very great pleasure it would give him to do so.

He was very much charmed with his companion; but he was forced to confess to himself that she did, after all, differ a good deal from the gentlewomen whom he was in the habit of meeting. Nor was it wonderful that she should: the daughter of an actress, brought up from her childhood among stage-traditions, driven at an early period, by her mother's death, to earn her own living, and having encountered for several years all the vicissitudes and experience of a half-vagrant life, it would have been a miracle had she not caught up some angular peculiarities from this rough-and-ready education. Anerley was amazed to find that easy audacity and frankness of speech, her waywardness and occasional eccentricity of behaviour, conjoined with an

almost ridiculous simplicity. The very attitude her Bohemianism led her to adopt towards the respectable in life, was in itself the result of a profound childlike ignorance; and, as he afterwards discovered, was chiefly the result of the tuition of a tender and anxious mother, who was afraid of her daughter ever straying from the folds of a profession which is so generous and kindly to the destitute and unprotected. All this, and much more, he was afterwards to learn of the young girl who had so interested him. In the meantime she seemed to him to be a spoilt child, who had something of the sensitiveness and sagacity of a woman.

"Look how he blushes," said the charming *soubrette* to *her* companion.

"Who?"

"The gentleman beside Miss Brunel."

"Are you jealous, that you watch these two so closely?"

"I'm not; but I do consider him handsome—handsomer than any man I know. He is not smooth, and fat, and polished like most gentlemen who do nothing. He looks like an engine-driver cleaned—and then his great brown moustache and his thick hair—no, I'll tell you what he's like; he is precisely the Ancient Briton you see in bronzes, with the thin face and the matted hair ——"

"And the scanty dress. I suppose the Ancient Britons, like Scotchmen now-a-days, wore an indelicate costume, in order to save cloth."

"I *do* consider him handsome; but *her!* And as for her being a great actress, and a genius, and all that, I don't consider her to be a bit better than any of us."

"If that is the case, I can quite understand and approve your depreciation of her."

"I will box your ears."

"Don't. They might tell tales; and you know I'm married."

"Tant pis pour toi."

The Ancient Briton had meanwhile recovered his equanimity; and both he and Miss Brunel had joined in an argument Mr. Melton was setting forth about the deliciousness of being without restraint. The grave manager, under the influence of a little champagne, invariably rose into the realm of abstract propositions; and, indeed, his three companions, all of them in a merry mood, helped him out with a dozen suggestions and confirmations.

"And worst of all," said Miss Brunel, "I dislike being bound down by time. Why must I go home just now, merely because it is late? I should like at this very moment to go straight out into the country, without any object, and without any prospect of return."

"And why not do so?" cried Count Schönstein. "My brougham can be brought round in a few minutes; let us four get in and drive straight away out of London—anywhere."

"A capital idea," said Melton. "What do you say, Miss Brunel?"

"I will go with pleasure," she replied, with bright childish fun in her eyes. "But we must take Mrs. Christmas with us. And that will be fire?"

"But I shall go outside and smoke," said Will Anerley.

The supper party now broke up; and the ladies went off to get their bonnets, wrappers and cloaks. In a few minutes Count Schönstein's brougham was at the door; and Miss Brunel, having explained to Mrs. Christmas the position of affairs, introduced her to Will Anerley. She had come forward to the door of the brougham, and Anerley saw a

side, as he had promised, when Count Schönstein made the offer, which his position demanded, to go instead.

"Yes, do," said Miss Brunel, putting her hand lightly on Will Anerley's arm.

The Count was, therefore, taken at his word; Anerley remained by the young actress's side; and Mrs. Christmas being dragged in, away rolled the brougham.

"And wherever are you going at this time of night, Miss Annie?" said the old woman, in amazement.

"For a drive into the country, mother. Look how bright it is."

And bright it was. There was no moon as yet; but there was clear starlight, and as they drove past the Green Park, the long rows of ruddy lamps hung in the far dark-

ness like strings of golden points, the counterpart of the gleaming silver points above. And there, away in the north, glimmered the pale jewels of Cassiopeia; the white star on Andromeda's forehead stood out from the dark sea; Orion coldly burned in the south, and the red eye of Aldebaran throbbed in the strange twilight. The dark grey streets, and the orange lamps, and the tall houses, and the solitary figures of men and women hurried past and disappeared; but the great blue vault, with its twinkling eyes, accompanied the carriage-windows, rolled onward with them, and always glimmered in.

This mad frolic was probably pleasant enough for every one of the merry little party inside the vehicle; but it could scarcely be very fascinating to the victimized Count who found himself driving through the chill night-air in company with

his own coachman. Perhaps, however, he wished to earn the gratitude of Miss Brunel by this dumb obedience to her whim; for he did not seek to arrest or alter the course of the brougham as it was driven blindly out into the country. He could hear the laughter from within the carriage; for they were all in the best of moods—except, perhaps, Miss Brunel, whom the sight of the stars rather saddened.

At length they came to a toll-bar. Melton put his head out and asked the Count where they were.

"Hounslow."

"Is that the Bell Inn?"

"Yes."

"Then suppose we get out, wake the people up, and give the horses a rest, while we have a little trip on foot to Hounslow Heath?"

"Is not that where all the murders and

robberies used to be committed?" Miss Brunel was heard to say.

"This is the very inn," said Will Anerley, "which the gentlemen of the road used to frequent; but, unfortunately, the Heath has been all enclosed. There is no more Heath."

"We shall find something that will do for it," said Melton, as the party left the brougham, and passed down the opposite road.

Once out of the glare of the lamp at the toll-bar, they had nothing to guide them but the cold, clear starlight. Black lay the hedges on either side; black stood the tall trees against the sky; blacker still the deep ditch which ran along the side of the path, or disappeared under the gravelled pathway leading up to some roadside cottage. How singularly the light laughter of the little party smote upon the deep, intense silence

of the place; and what a strange contrast there was between their gay abandonment and the sombre gloom around them. There was something weird and striking running through the absurdity of this incomprehensible excursion.

"There," said Melton, going up to a gate, and peering over into a vague, dark meadow, "is a bit of the old Heath, I know. Was it here, I wonder, that Claude Duval danced his celebrated dance with the lady?"

"Let us suppose it was," said the Count. "And why should we not have a dance now on the Heath? Mr. Melton, will you give us some music?"

"With pleasure," said the manager, opening the gate, and allowing his merry companions to pass into the meadow.

They went along until they were within a short distance of a clump of trees; and

then, the Count having been ingeniously compelled to take Mrs. Christmas as his partner, Miss Brunel being Anerley's *vis-à-vis*, the manager proceeded to sing a set of quadrilles in rather an unmelodious manner, varying *la, la, la,* with *tow, row, row.* The great, pompous Count puffed, and blew, and guffawed; the little Mrs. Christmas danced with a prim and grave precision; while all did their best to help out the figures, and stumbled, and set each other right again, and laughed right heartily over the mad performance.

Then there was a sudden shriek, clear and sharp, that rang through the darkness; the dancing suddenly ceased; and Anerley sprang forward just in time to prevent Miss Brunel from sinking to the ground, her face pale as death.

"Did you not see it?" she gasped, still trembling. "Something white flashed

past through the trees there—in a moment —and it seemed to have no shape."

"By Jove, I saw it, too," said Melton, who had abruptly ceased his singing; "and for the life of me I can't imagine what it was."

"A white cow," suggested Anerley.

"I tell you it flew past like a streak of lightning," said Melton.

"More likely a white doe belonging to the park over there," said the Count, who was inwardly the most terrified person present.

"Let us get away from here," said Miss Brunel, who had recovered her self-composure, but was very grave. "Whatever it was, the grass is too wet for us to remain."

So they left the meadow, and walked, rather silently, back to the toll-bar; got into the brougham, and were driven to their respective homes.

CHAPTER V.

ST. MARY-KIRBY.

CHAMPAGNE has many good qualities, but none more marked than the mild and temporary nature of the stimulus it affords. The bright and cheerful excitement it produces—so long as it is neither Russian champagne, nor one of those highly ingenious products which chemistry and the wit of man have devised—does not last so long as to interfere with any serious occupation, even should that be merely sleep; while it involves none of the gloomy reaction which too often haunts the sparkle of other wines with a warning shadow. When Will Anerley

got up on the morning following the wild escapade on Hounslow Heath, it was not indulgence in wine which smote him with a half-conscious remorse. He had neither a throbbing headache nor a feverish pulse. But as he looked out of his bedroom window and saw the pale sun glimmering down on the empty streets, the strange calm of a Sunday morning—touching even in the cramped thoroughfares of London—fell upon him, and he thought of the hectic gaiety of the previous night, and knew that all the evening one tender girlish heart had been wearying for his coming, away down in a quiet Kentish vale.

His absence was the more inexcusable in that it was uncertain how soon he might have to leave England. He was a civil engineer; and, from the time he had left the apprentice stool, his life had been a series of foreign excursions. He had been

two years in Turkey, another year in Canada, six months in Russia, and so on; and at this moment he had been but a short time home from Wallachia, whence he had returned with his face browner, his frame tougher than ever. There was little of the young Englishman about him. There was a Celtic intensity in him which had long ago robbed him of the loose fat, the lazy gait, the apathetic indifference which generally fall to the lot of lads born and brought up as he had been; and now—with his big brown moustache, thick hair, and hazel eyes, and with that subdued determination in his look, which had made the little *soubrette* call him an Ancient Briton—he was a man whom some would call handsome, but whom most people would admire chiefly on account of the intelligence, firmness of character, and determination written upon his face.

He dressed and breakfasted hastily; got a cab, and was just in time to catch the train. After nearly an hour's drive down through Kent—pleasant enough on that bright Spring morning—he reached Horton, the station nearest to St. Mary-Kirby.

Horton stands on the top of a hill sloping down into the valley in which lies St. Mary-Kirby; and if you climb, as Will Anerley did, to the top of a coal heap which generally stands beside the empty trucks of the station, you will see the long wooded hollow from end to end, with its villages, churches, and breadths of field and meadow. It was not to look again, however, on that pretty bit of scenery which he knew so well that he scrambled to the top of the coals, and stood there, with his hand shading his eyes from the sunlight. It was Dove Anerley he wished to see come along the valley, on her way to church; and he waited

there to discover what route she should take, that so he might intercept her.

Yet there seemed to be no living thing in the quiet valley. Sleepily lay the narrow river in its winding channel, marked by twin rows of pollard willows, now green with their first leaves; sleepily lay the thin blue smoke above the far white cottages and the grey churches; sleepily lay the warm sunlight over the ruddy ploughed fields, the green meadows, the dark fir-wood along the top of the hill; and sleepily it struck on the great, gleaming chalk-pit on the side of the incline; while a sleepy blue haze hung around the dim horizon, half hiding the white specks of houses on the distant uplands. It was a beautiful picture in the tender light of the young spring; but there was no Dove Anerley there.

He looked at his watch.

"Half-past ten," he thought, "and, as

our church is under repair, she is sure to walk to Woodhill Church. But if I go down into the valley, I shall be sure to miss her."

As he spoke, there was visible a tiny speck of grey and brown crossing a broad meadow near the river; and almost at the same moment the subdued and distant music of the church bells floated up on the air. Will Anerley leapt from the coal-heap to the ground; and then straight down the hill he went, making free use of the fields on his way.

He suddenly found that the still valley was full of life, and sound, and gladness; that the morning was a miracle of mornings; that the breath of the sweet spring air seemed laden with the secret odours of innumerable flowers. And, indeed, as he walked on, there was plenty to delight him, even had Dove Anerley not been there. For

the lamb-like March had bequeathed to his fickle sister a legacy of golden weather, and she now carried it in her open hand, sharing it with all of us. The orchards were white with bloom, here and there a rose-red apple-tree among the snowy bunches of the pears; the meadows were thick with daisies and cowslips, the grey sheep throwing sharp black shadows on the glowing green; the tall elms, sprinkled over with young leaves, rose from rough and ragged earth banks that were covered with withered brier, and glistening celandine, dull colts-foot, and ruddy dead-nettle; the stately chesnuts had burst their resinous buds and were already showing brown spikes of closed flowers; along the hedges, where the blackbird was nursing her young, and the thrush sitting on her second nestful of blue eggs, the blossoms of the blackthorn sparkled here and there like white stars among

the rich, thick green of the elm; and through all these colours and lights and shadows ran, and hummed, and sung the coarse cawing of rooks, the murmur of bees, the splashing of the river down at the mill, and the silvery music of a lark which hung as if suspended by a thread from the cold, clear blue above.

St. Mary-Kirby was just visible and no more. You could see the quaint old mill down by the river-side, and near it an ancient farm-house, with black cattle and horses in the yard, and white pigeons flying about the rusty-red tiles of the farm buildings. Further up, the old grey church, built of "Kentish rag," shone brightly in the sunshine; and then, among the trees, you caught a glimpse of the cottages, of Mr. Anerley's house, fronting the village green, and of the old inn with its swaying sign. There is not in Kent a more thoroughly

English village than St. Mary-Kirby; and one, at least, of its inhabitants used to pray fervently every Sunday morning that no railway should ever come near its precincts.

When Will Anerley reached the bottom of the valley, he found a number of St. Mary-Kirby people walking, in isolated groups, towards Woodhill church; but one only of these people had chosen a somewhat circuitous route through the meadows lying on the south side of the river. Why she had chosen this route was probably known only to herself; but, at any rate, Will paused by the side of a stile to which the path through the meadows led. He had recognised from a considerable distance the slate-grey silk dress and brown velvet jacket which she wore; and now, as he watched her coming along, he saw that she, too, had recognised him, and that there was a pleased look in her eyes.

"Why did you come this way?" he asked, as she drew near.

"Because I thought I should meet you," she replied, with a frank smile.

He helped her up and down the rude wooden steps, and as she alit upon the other side she suffered him to touch her cheek with his lips.

"Good morning, Dove."

"Good morning, Will. I made up my mind to scold you dreadfully; and all the way over from St. Mary I have been thinking what I should say to you; and now I haven't it in my heart to say a single word."

"Heaght" for "heart," she said, and "woghd" for "word;" and there was a quaint softness in this purring mannerism which made her utterances all the more tender, and seemed to harmonize with the childlike prettiness of the large violet eyes set in the

delicate face, which was surrounded by crisp and wavy light-brown hair.

"That's a good girl," he said; and then she put her hand on his arm, and they walked away between the green hedges, towards Woodhill church.

It was at a concert in St. James's Hall that I first saw Dove Anerley; and while the people sang "Athalie," I sate and wondered what was the story written on that beautiful, almost sad face. It was one of those rare faces which tantalize you in the very act of admiring them. There was nothing in it of that mature, vigorous, definite beauty of form and complexion which a man may calmly observe and criticise in the face of a woman; but a tender uncertainty, a half-suggested and shrinking loveliness which made one vaguely conscious that this frail and beautiful smile of nature might suddenly vanish from the fine features. It was

not that the girl seemed unwell, or even in any degree fragile; but simply that one, in looking at her face, could not help regretting that her loveliness was not less delicate and more pronounced, that there was not more life and less sensitiveness in her large violet eyes. How beautiful she looked that evening! The passionate music seemed to have called up a flush upon her bright complexion, and lent some strange wistfulness to her big eyes; and then, when she turned to her companions and smiled, her pretty mouth and nut-white teeth might have driven a painter mad. Indeed, I know of at least one artist then present who forgot all about Mendelssohn in trying so to fix her expression on his memory that he might afterwards reproduce it on canvas—her expression, her face, and the loose golden-brown hair bound down by a band of dark-blue velvet. It was two years afterwards that accident threw me

in the way of the Anerleys. I had never forgotten the meaning apparently written on that sensitive face; but Dove's story, as I then heard it, differed entirely from what I had imagined.

"Why have you come alone this morning?" said Will Anerley to his companion, as they walked.

"You know papa never goes to church," said the young girl. "And mamma has never gone to hear Mr. Oldham since he spoke to her about the Athanasian creed. I suppose you did not hear about that since you came home?"

"No," said Will; though he had an idea why his mother—whom Dove had also been taught to call "mamma"—feared the Athanasian creed.

"You know," continued the girl, very seriously, "how anxious mamma is because papa won't go to church and because of his

studies and the strange things he says at times; and sometimes she gets very sad about it. It is the only thing she is ever sad about; and when I tell her that there can't be much wrong in what so good a man believes, she only gets the sadder, and sometimes cries a little bit. Well, this Sunday morning she and I were talking about it all the way to church, and she was very much disturbed. I don't think she had ever paid any attention to the Athanasian creed before; but on that morning, Mr. Oldham read it, and I saw her look strangely at him and at the book. Then all at once her face got quite white, she shut the book, and without a word to me walked out of the church and went straight home."

"And I suppose my father laughed a little, and tried to make her believe that he had already constructed some theoretical

fire-escape from the dangers with which he was threatened."

"Mr. Oldham came over next day to call upon mamma, and he was talking very seriously to her, and making her very miserable—indeed, she was crying nearly all the time—when papa came into the room."

"Oh,—was it by the door that Mr. Oldham left?"

"What do you mean? Papa stood there, with that curious smile he has on his face when he puzzles and perplexes people, you know; and in a few minutes Mr. Oldham was in a terrible rage. I remember distinctly one thing papa said. 'Mr. Oldham,' he said, with a sort of twinkle in his eye, 'I am not surprised that you have the Athanasian creed in your service; for clergymen, like other men, must be allowed the use of bad language occasionally. But you should

indulge yourself privately, and not frighten women when they go to pray in your church.'"

"How very wicked of him! But then, Dove, Mr. Oldham belongs to the next parish; and he had no business to go poaching on Mr. Bexley's manor."

"And so very anxious she is about you also, Will. She is sometimes very sad about papa; but she can't help seeing what a good man he is. She says to me that you are young, and that if you grow up to believe what he believes, you may not be quite the same—you know, dear, that is only a feeling she has."

"Who wouldn't be orthodox to please such a mother?" said Will.

"And I, too," said the girl, with a touch of colour in her cheek, and in rather a lower voice, "I should be grieved to think that—that—that you did not care about going to

church, and that you did not believe as we do."

"What should have made you think about all these things?" asked Anerley, with some astonishment.

"Well, when you wrote to us from Jassy, saying you were coming home, mamma came to papa and begged him to lock up all those dangerous books he is so fond of. 'My dear,' he said to her, 'Will knows more about such matters than I know; for he has breathed the new atmosphere of these new times, whereas I have nothing to help me but reading.' Is it true, Will?"

"Is what true? I tell you, darling, I will be whatever you wish me to be; so don't distress your mind about it."

It was their arrival at the church-door which stopped this conversation. They entered, and seated themselves in a tall, damp pew, while a small organ was sending

its smooth and solemn notes through the hushed little building.

They were not "engaged," these two; but themselves and everybody connected with them looked forward to their marriage as a matter of course. Dove Anerley was the daughter of a distant relative of Mrs. Anerley's, who had gladly escaped from a variety of misfortunes by the easy gateway of death; and Mr. Anerley had adopted the child, brought her up, and grown passionately fond of her. He was a man of very peculiar notions, which had earned for him among the vulgar the charitable title of atheist and materialist; and so this dangerous and wicked person sat down one day before his son, when the young man had come home from college, and said to him—

"Attend to what I am going to say, Will. You have a good prospect before you: you have a sound constitution, a

tolerable education, and plenty of natural ability. I am not going to spoil your chances in life by letting you fancy that you will have any money at my death—do you understand? I will start you in any profession you choose; thereafter you must fight your own battle, as befits a man; and whatever I leave will go to your mother and to Dove. If you were a fool, I should make some provision for you; as it is, I wont."

"Why, you don't suppose, father, I would rob either Dove or my mother of anything you could give them?"

That was all that passed between the two men on the subject; and in time it came to be regarded as a matter of course that Dove Anerley was to inherit whatever wealth her foster-father should leave behind him, irrespective of the provision for his widow.

Had Will Anerley stayed at home, and

been accustomed to regard Dove as his sister, he would never have thought of marrying her. But even in his boyhood he had been of a singularly active and inquiring character; always anxious to study new subjects, new scenes, new faces; never satisfied with any achievement as an ultimate result; and so, his apprenticeship completed, instead of hiring himself out as an assistant to the engineer of some railway or other company, and spending a dull life in a dingy office, he threw himself boldly upon the world, and went up and down, acquiring such knowledge as no man can gain by the study of books. Nor was it only in professional directions that his enquiries extended. He had caught what is called "the spirit" of these times; was full of vague idealisms, particularly of a philanthropic kind; and was moved by a restless desire to trace back to first principles the commonest conditions

of modern existence. That is a phase through which most young men who read books pass. Now and again only do we find a man of sufficient strength of character to preserve those gentle tendencies against the rough wear and tear of travel and its consequent experience. Great, therefore, was his delight to have a profession which allowed him to move freely about; and wherever he went the tender remembrance of Dove Anerley went with him.

As for her she had never taken any pains to conceal from anybody her fondness for him—a fondness which had grown to be a part of her life. He was mixed up in all the finest aspirations, he was the creator of all the noblest idealisms of her too-delicately sensitive organization. In that supreme religious exaltation which is produced by fine music, by earnest prayer, or by a beautiful sunset, his was the human

face towards which, unconsciously to herself, she looked for the divine sympathy and compassion which in such moments man begs from the Deity. Even now, as they stood in the old oaken pew, and as she sang sweetly and clearly that tenderest of hymns—

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!"

—was she guilty of any great crime in involuntarily making him the object of that impassioned cry? Her love was her religion, her religion her love; she knew not how to distinguish between them, and like the old Romans had but one word to describe this holiest feeling of her nature.

"Now, Will," she said cheerfully, as the people streamed out of the close little building into the sweet-smelling air, "let us have a nice long walk through Woodhill Wood

on our way home ; it is covered with flowers just now; and then you will tell me why you did not come down last night. Everybody expected you, and dinner was as dull as it could be without you. The Hepburns were over, you know, and Mr. Drysdale, and they came half an hour too soon and sate in the drawing-room, and talked of nothing but the number of breeding partridges, and the condition of the trout, and how they hoped the orchards wouldn't suffer by this early hot weather. Only big John Hepburn—who does nothing in the world but shoot and go to hounds, you know — made papa laugh very much by stretching his long legs, yawning, and saying disconsolately, 'Ah, yes, Mr. Anerley, we're getting into the dreary summer months.' He couldn't understand why papa laughed, and said he had made no joke he was aware of."

By this time they had walked through the tall, green grass of the churchyard, had clambered up the hill a bit, and left the warm sunshine for the cool shade of the wood. Only here and there did the sunlight glimmer down through the dense forest of young oak and birch; but there was no need of sunlight to make that tangled carpeting of moss and grass and wild-flowers any the brighter. All around them, and as far as they could see down the glades between the trees, the earth was thick with anemones and great clusters of primroses, here and there a few wild hyacinths among patches of tenderly-veined wood-sorrel, and everywhere the blush-coloured cuckoo-flower with its coronet of pale pink buds. Hushed and still the place was except when a jay went screaming from one tall tree to another, or some cawing rook flew past through the width of fleecy blue and white overhead.

"I stayed in town, then, Dove, to go to a little supper, and there I met Miss Brunel."

"The actress whom everybody is talking about?"

"Yes."

"You met her privately?"

"Yes; why should that astonish you?"

"Do tell me what she is like—what she said to you—did she speak to you?"

"She is a very handsome girl, with splendid hair and eyes, and the most charming manner. What amused me chiefly was the half-maternal way in which she talked to me—who might have been her father,—and the airs of profound experience which she quite unconsciously gave herself. Then all the time she was ready to be amused by the tiniest things; indeed, it was quite a pleasure to sit near her and watch the comfortable, self-satisfied, almost childish way in

which she delighted herself with everything."

Will spoke quite warmly; his companion was silent for some time afterwards.

"Why are you so quiet this morning, Dove?" he asked.

"Am I more than usually quiet?" she said.

"Indeed," he continued, without taking further notice of the matter, "I *was* vexed with myself for not coming down last evening. The fact is, I may not have many Saturday afternoons down at the old place before I leave again. I am thinking of going to Honduras——"

"To Honduras!" she repeated, rather faintly; "why should you go to Honduras?"

"They want to sink some Artesian wells about——"

"Is there no one in Honduras can sink Artesian wells?" she asked, with a scarcely-concealed pout of vexation. "Your father says you have thrown away plenty of your life in going abroad, and that now you should settle here and get up a good connexion in your own country."

"Although Miss Brunel made me feel old by her efforts to play the mother to me, Dove, I am young enough to feel a touch of wandering blood stir in me yet."

"Send Miss Brunel to make the Artesian wells!" said Dove, with a quick flush on her face, and then she broke out laughing, partly because she was amused at herself, and partly because she was out of humour with him.

Indeed nothing delighted him so much as to see a little harmless break in the even gentleness of the young girl's manner. It was like the rustling of a piece of tissue

paper, or the crumpling of a rose-leaf; the little petulances of which she was sometimes guilty were but a source of amusement to both of them.

CHAPTER VI.

CHESNUT BANK.

AT last they reached the brow of the hill, and beneath them lay St. Mary-Kirby, the sunlight falling lightly on the grey church, the white wooden cottages, the broad green common, and on two tall-necked swans floating on the glass-like mill-head.

Mr. Anerley's house — known in the neighbourhood as Chesnut Bank — was separated from the common by a large circular pond which was fed by a spring, and that again was divided from the house by a tall hedge, a row of short limes with black

stems and young green leaves, and a pretty large lawn. Behind the house was a long garden now almost smothered in blossom, and along the carriage-drive stood rows of lilacs and acacias, with here and there an almond-tree, which yet bore a sprinkling of deep pink flowers. It was an old-fashioned house of red brick, the original builder's intention having clearly been to sacrifice to inside comfort outside appearance. When Mr. Anerley, therefore, had one side of it partly rebuilt, he had no scruple in adorning the drawing-room with French windows, which opened out upon the lawn, while the dining-room at the other side of the building had two large bay windows of the usual height from the ground. The house, nevertheless, was very snug and comfortable; and if you looked across the common and the pond, and saw it nestled among the thick foliage of lime and lilac and birch, you

would say it was a very charming little country residence.

When Dove and her companion got down to this sheltered little place, they found it as usual alive with children. The gathering together from all his friends and relations of whatever small boys and girls they could spare, was a hobby of Mr. Anerley's. He liked to keep a perpetual children's party going at Chesnut Bank; and there was not a governess in one of his friends' houses who did not owe to him many a grateful holiday. Then this monstrous ogre of a materialist, who already smelt of brimstone in the nostrils of the people around, was as careful about the proprieties and go-to-bed prayers of the little ones as he was convinced that amusement ought to be their chief education. Indeed he once caught the Buttons of the small establishment amusing himself and a companion by teaching a little boy to

repeat some highly improper phrases, and before the youthful joker knew where he was, he felt the lithe curl of a horsewhip round his legs—a sensation he remembered for many a day after while gaily polishing his spoons and washing out his decanters.

At this moment a little girl was seated at the piano laboriously playing a hymn-tune possessed of no very recondite chords; while on the lawn in front Mr. Anerley lay at full length, a book between his face and the sunshine. Mrs. Anerley sat on a low chair beside him, also reading, a large deerhound at her feet; while two or three more children were scampering over the lawn, occasionally "coming a cropper" over a croquet-hoop. She was a pretty little woman, with dark brown hair and eyes,—nervous, sensitive, and full of the tenderest idealisms — altogether a noble, affectionate, and loveable little woman. Her husband was a rather

tall and spare man, with short rough grey hair and whiskers, an aquiline nose, and gentle grey eyes. He was a keen sportsman, and a languid student: a man who liked to cover his weaknesses of sentiment with a veil of kindly humour; and seemed to live very easily and comfortably, considering that he was accused of harbouring materialism—that terrible quicklime, which according to some profound calculators is about to shrivel up the heavens and the earth, and all the gentle humanities which have been growing up through so many thousand years.

"Hillo, Will," said Mr. Anerley, as the young man approached and kissed his mother, "why didn't you come down last night?"

"Old Hubbard got me to stay in town with him that we might go to a supper."

"He told me he would likely see you; and asked us all to walk over to the Place in

the evening. Poor man, he has never been himself since the Lord Chamberlain refused to let him attend a levée as the Count von Schönstein. Will, when anybody offers you 30,000*l.* a year, don't take it."

"I wont, father."

"Hubbard used to be as jolly, happy, and stupid a man as you could wish to meet; and since he got that money left him, he has been the most miserable of mortals. I asked him yesterday why he did not go amongst the city people, become a councillor, or alderman, or mayor, or get a baronetcy by buying a railway, or do something of the kind; and he crushed me with his contemptuous silence. He must have spent a lot of money in buying his countship; and yet he can't get one of the old families to look at him. If some indigent lady does not marry him, or if the Prince of Wales does not pick him up as a butt, he will die of spleen."

"And he is a good sort of fellow too," said Will. "It is a shame to invent stories about his frantic efforts to get among the aristocracy, as they're doing in town just now. I think it's one's duty to cheer him up a bit. Fancy him living all by himself in that great house—a man who can no more read than he can shoot, or fish, or ride. By the way, he tumbled off his horse in the Park on Friday morning, and nearly knocked over a little girl of Lady Charlton's, who was out for the first time. And I had half promised to introduce him to Lady Charlton; I suppose he'll decline now, after making an exhibition of himself."

"He wont, you'll see. My poor Hubbard would kiss the ground on which Lady Charlton treads, although I suppose he hasn't seen her yet."

"I think you are two spiteful wretches,"

said Dove, "lying there, on such a beautiful day, and laughing at one of your own friends. I think the Count a very nice gentleman, and——"

"And he brought you down a coronet of blue pearls the other day," said Mrs. Anerley, with a smile.

"Why, I've never seen that wonderful head-gear you were talking about, Dove," said Will. "Do go, and put it on now."

Dove was nowise loth; she knew as well as anybody how pretty she looked in her new article of attire. In a few minutes she returned, and stood at the open glass door, the creepers on the front of the house framing her in as if she were a picture. This head-dress—which I cannot describe scientifically—the Count had purchased abroad; and, had he gone over Europe, he could not have found anything to suit Dove's face and hair so well. There was first a simple tiara

of blue pearls fixed on a gleaming blue band; then there were one or two loose strings of the pearls taken back to bind down a soft thick swathe of white muslin which came down under the chin and encompassed the pretty head. The blue strings among the light brown hair, the thick, soft, snowy circle round the slightly flushed face, the pleased, self-conscious eyes, and the half-smiling mouth—altogether they formed such a bright, soft, charming little picture that Mr. Anerley cried out—

"Come here at once, Dove, and kiss me, or I shall believe you're a fairy!"

And when he had his arm round her neck, he said—

"I expected every moment to see you fly right away up into the air, and then we should have seen no more of you than if you were a little white pigeon quite lost up in the blue."

"But I should come down again, papa, when I wanted something to eat."

"Or your glass of port-wine after dinner, eh?"

They had dinner early at Chesnut Bank on Sundays, to let the servants get to afternoon church. And on Sundays, also, all the children dined downstairs; so that they had quite a fine party to-day, when they assembled round the table. Dove had seen that all the little boys' and girls' costume was correct; had got fresh flowers for the table; and wore herself a pretty white dress with blue ribbons—adding considerably to the brightness and liveliness of the family gathering.

"Had you a good sermon to-day, Dove?" asked Mr. Anerley.

"Yes, papa; but I don't like Mr. Oldham."

She had never forgiven the good man for

his too great anxiety about the Athanasian Creed.

"By the way, mamma," continued Mr. Anerley, "don't let me forget to tell you what I was reading in the papers this morning—although it will shock you, I know. They're going to secularize the Church."

Mrs. Anerley looked up—vaguely conscious that something dreadful was going to happen.

"The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are to be abolished; the churches are to be turned into school-rooms; and the clergymen may, if they like, remain and be schoolmasters. If they don't, they must walk out."

"Quite true, mother," continued Will, taking up the wondrous tale; "and the Government means to cut up all the ecclesiastical property, the glebe-lands, and what not, into small farms for the use of the poor people."

"The Prime Minister himself says it is useless trying to save the soul of a man until you give him a soul; and says that no man has a soul who is not properly fed and educated."

"He says no man can have a soul," repeated Will, "who has less than twenty shillings a week; and until that minimum is reached, the clergymen must turn farm-bailiffs or teachers. After then, the people may think about getting up churches once more. All the bishops are to be provided with a home in the Dramatic College at Maybury; the archbishops, in consideration of their inexperience of the world——"

"They're only laughing at you, mamma," said Dove.

"And a pretty example to set the children," said Mrs. Anerley. "Whoever laughs at mamma is sent upstairs to bed at once."

"Dove," said Will, suddenly, "do you know where you are going to-morrow?"

"No."

"Up to town. We're all going—except those young people who must remain in expectation of what we shall bring them when we return. You shall see, Dove—what shall you not see? I have always promised to give you a good dose of town; and now you shall have it. You shall sit up in a wire cage in the House of Commons, and look over the heads of the reporters on the drowsy gentlemen beneath. You shall see Mr. Gladstone, lying back, with his head in the air; you shall see Mr. Disraeli, apparently going to cry; and Lord Stanley, with his hat on the back of his head, and his hands in his pockets, looking as if he had just lost a bet."

"I shouldn't care a bit about one of them," said Dove.

"Then you shall go to another wire cage at Evans's; and you shall see a row of pale little boys in black, with their hands behind them, singing to rows of decorous gentlemen; or you may light upon the audience in its idiotic stage, and find them applauding Philistinic politics over their raw chops. Then — and listen, mamma! — the programme begins with a box, to-morrow evening, at the —— theatre, where Miss Annie Brunel is playing her 'Juliet.'"

"The new actress, Will?" asked his father.

"Yes."

"Ah, *now* you promise us something worth seeing," said Dove, with glad eyes. "And oh, mamma, Will knows Miss Brunel, and has spoken to her, and says that she is——"

"Lovely," she was about to say; but she added "pretty," moderating her enthusiasm.

"Yes, I think she is rather pghetty," said Will; at which all the children laughed. "But you'll judge for yourself to-morrow night."

After dinner, and when the children had received a tiny sip of port wine along with their fruit, Mr. Anerley proposed to Will that they should smoke outside; and so a small table, some decanters and glasses, and a few chairs were carried out, and placed under a great cedar tree, which was now beginning to get a soft green velvet over its dark shelves of branches.

"Dove," whispered Mr. Anerley, "go and ask mamma if I mayn't have my song to-day?"

"But, papa, it's Sunday."

"Tell mamma to take all the children into the meadow, with some bread for the pony. They wont hear it, then."

This was accordingly done; and then

Dove, opening the French window of the drawing-room, so that the music might pass out to the gentlemen underneath the cedar, sang, very prettily indeed, Mr. Anerley's particular song—"Where the bee sucks." Her voice was not a powerful one, but it was very tender and expressive; and there was a quaint softness in that purring habit of hers which made her sing, "Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now."

And when she went outside to Mr. Anerley, and knelt down beside him, to ask him if he was satisfied, he put his arm round her waist and said, with a smile,

"Meghily, meghily shall I sleep now, my darling. I should have been miserable all the afternoon if I had not heard my own song. I believe I wrote it, Dove."

"You mustn't sleep now, papa," she said, blushing a little over her bad pronunci-

ation, " for you said we were going to walk over to the Place this afternoon."

"So I did; and we shall start presently."

CHAPTER VII.

BALNACLUITH PLACE.

"IT often surprises me," said Mr. Anerley, as the little party made its way across the common of St. Mary-Kirby, in the warm evening glow, "that Hubbard cares to keep up acquaintance with us. We always dislike people who have known us in ill-fortune, or penury, or great depression. I even hate the flavour of cigars that I have smoked in time of sickness; I must have others when I get well again. Now, Hubbard, with his deer-park, and harriers, and thirty thousand a year, ought to be disgusted with people who knew him as a tea-broker."

"Don't be so ill-natured about Mr. Hubbard, dear," said his wife, with a smile. "I'm sure he is a big, soft, stupid, well-meaning sort of man."

Mr. Anerley was not quite so certain about the softness and good intentions of the Count; but he charitably forbore to speak. Dove and Will, who had stood for a few seconds on the bridge, to watch the two swans come sailing towards them in expectation of crumbs—cleaving the burnished gold of the mill-head into long purple lines—now came up; and they walked away from the still little village, along the green lanes, until they drew near "the Place."

It was a great, sombre, fine old building, which had figured in history under another name—a large building of gloomy red brick, with innumerable mullioned windows, and peaks, and stone griffins—a building that had here and there grown grey and orange

with the lichens, and rain and wind of many years. It stood upon a high terrace on the side of a hill sloping down to the river, which ran along the valley to St. Mary-Kirby; and at this point the stream—a line of flashing gold winding through the soft green—divided the terrace and lawn of the house from the great park opposite, with its magnificent elms and its small, close-lying herd of deer. Round about the Place, too, were some fine trees, on a particular cluster of which a colony of rooks had established themselves at some bygone time. Altogether a noble and handsome old building was this Balnacluith Place, for which the Graf von Schönstein had—not without a purpose—expended a large sum of money, on his accession to fortune. Alas! the influence of the Place had fled the moment he bought it. The brilliant gentlemen and lovely ladies whom the Count had pictured

to himself dining in the great hall, or walking in the broad park, never appeared. The grand old house had lost its mesmerism; and no longer drew down from London those brilliant parties of wits, and beaux, and belles who once—as the Count had informed himself—held their merry revels there. He had sparkling wines at his command; lights he could have in abundance; when he chose, the dining-hall was brilliant with plate, and flowers, and fruit—but the ladies and gentlemen whom he had mentally invited, stayed away. And he was not the man to go out into the highways and byways, and gather in beggars to his feast. He had aimed at a particular kind of guests: they had not come; but there was yet hope of their coming.

When the Anerleys drew near, they perceived the figure of a man walking solitarily up and down the stone terrace in front

of the house. His only companions were the couchant lions at each end of the terrace, which had kept guard there, over the few steps, for nearly a couple of centuries.

"It is Hubbard himself," said Mr. Anerley.

"He looks like the ghost of some dead owner of the house, come back to take his accustomed stroll," said Will.

"At all events, he is smoking," said Dove.

When the Count perceived his visitors, he threw away his cigar, and came down to meet them, saluting them with florid and formal courtesy.

"No need to ask how *you* are, Miss Anerley—charming as ever. Persuaded our friend Will to give up his wandering life, eh?"

This was the Count's great joke: it had

never been known to fail, at least, in rendering Dove very uncomfortable.

"What a fine evening! Look how beautiful the trees are down there!" he continued, allowing his eye to roam over the prospect before him in innocent pride—looking, indeed, as if he thought that God had prepared the sunset simply to light up Count Schönstein's park.

"It is a fine park; and a beautiful evening, too," said Mr. Anerley. "It is a pity that most beautiful things make one sad."

"That is because we don't possess them," said the Count, laughing; he was of a practical turn of mind.

The Count turned to the ladies, and—as was his universal custom when he wished to be polite—he insisted on their going inside and having a glass of wine.

"Look here, Anerley," he said, when both of them declined, "you must come and try

some port I got down last night—bought it at the sale of Major Benson's cellar on Thursday—10*l.* a dozen, and cheap at the money."

"If it was sent home last night, I'd rather not," said Mr. Anerley, with a smile.

"I didn't mean that particular wine," replied the Count, unblushingly. "Or will you all stay and dine with me? Do; I dine at eight."

This was what is bluntly called a lie; the Count—except when circumstances compelled him—never forsook his old dinner-hour of five. He had, in fact, only begun his second cigar after dinner when the Anerleys arrived. But the Count probably fancied that a mere courtesy-lie wasn't much, and trusted to his visitors declining the invitation, which they did.

"I would rather go down and see the

deer," said Dove. "Didn't you say you had some roe-deer amongst them?"

"Those I had brought from Schönstein?" said the Count, rather pompously. "They all died, as Hermann said they would. But it was an experiment, you know. I must get Hermann, if we're going into the park; the deer wont come to me."

He went into the house for a few moments, and reappeared, followed by the keeper, a splendid-looking fellow, with a brown, handsome face, great shoulders, and long legs encased in rough top-boots. This Hermann had been the head-keeper, chief forester, and what not, of Schönstein, when Mr. Hubbard bought the place; and, on the principle of the Portuguese navigators, who brought home men and women from the Guinea coast to prove that they had been there, the Count carried the big Schwarzwalder over to England with him, as a specimen of what

he had purchased abroad. Unlike most of his Schwarzwald brethren, Hermann knew not a word of English; Hubbard knew not a word of German; and for many a month after his expatriation, the efforts of master and man to understand each other formed a constant comedy at the Place. In one or two cases Mr. Anerley was besought to act as interpreter; and even now nothing delighted the stalwart, good-natured Black-forester so much as a long talk in his native language with any of his master's guests who were capable and complaisant enough to humour him.

"Hermann," said the Count, loudly, to let his visitors know that *now* he could support his rank by talking in the language of the country which gave it him, "das Fräulein wünscht die — die Rehe zu sehen——"

"The Rehe are all died, Herr Graf," said

the sturdy keeper, who would not have his native tongue burlesqued.

"Ich meine die—die—the deer that are there," said the Count, sharply and hotly, "und sie müssen, wissen Sie, etwas—etwas —eh—ah—etwas Speise——"

"Futter, nicht wahr?" suggested Will, looking gravely at Dove.

"Yes, yes, of course; the fellow knows well enough. I mean to get the deer to come up to him."

"They will come without nothing, Herr Graf," said the tall forester.

They crossed the small iron bridge leading from the lawn over the river into the park. The deer were for the most part lying down, underneath the shadow of three large oaks, one or two only still standing and nibbling the grass. When our party drew near, however, the whole herd rose and retreated a little, while one of the

bucks came proudly to the front and stood with his small head and tall horns erect, watching the approach of the strangers.

"Will you come with me, Fräulein?" said Hermann; and Dove went forward with him, leaving the others behind.

No sooner had the keeper thus made himself distinctly visible, than two or three of the does came timidly forward, alternating a little quiet canter with a distrustful pause, and at last one of them came quite up to the keeper and looked rather wistfully at his hand with her large, soft brown eyes.

"This is her I call *Lämmchen*," said Hermann, stroking the small neck of the hind, "she is so tame. And there is *Leopard* over there, with the spots on him. I speak to them in German; they know it all the same."

One of the bucks now seemed also desirous to approach; looking about him in a sheepish way, however, as if it were beneath his dignity for him to follow the example of the women of his tribe.

"Komm her, du furchtsamer Kerl!" said Hermann, going forward, and taking hold of him by one of his broad, palmated horns; "he is a fine deer, is he not? Look at his horns and his bright colours. He is better than for to be in a park, like the cows. He should be in the woods."

He took a piece of brown bread from his pocket and gave it to Dove, who held it to the small mouth of the buck, where it was speedily nibbled up. Then she stroked his neck, and looked at his big, apprehensive eyes; and then they went back to the group whom they had left.

"Miss Anerley," said the Count, "wont you persuade those people to go inside and

modest and complaisant indeed, that he joked about his old calling.

They went inside, and sat in a large, sombre, oaken-panelled room, with the fast fading light coldly falling through the diamond panes of the tall and narrow windows. Then lamps were brought in, and tea; and they sat talking and chatting for nearly an hour.

When they went out upon the terrace again, to go home, there was a pale moonlight lying over the lawn, hitting sharply here and there on the stone mullions of the windows, and touching greyly and softly a thin mist which had settled down upon the park. It was a beautiful, still night; and as Dove and Will went home, they allowed Mr. and Mrs. Anerley to get on so far in front

of them that at last they were only visible as dark specks on the white road.

For some time they walked on in silence; and then Will said, carelessly,

"Will you go up to town with me to-morrow morning, Dove, and I'll devote the whole day to you; or will you come up with my father in the afternoon?"

She did not answer him; and then, in a second or two, when he looked down, he was surprised to find her eyes full of tears.

"Whatever is the matter, Dove?"

"Oh, Will," she said, turning the beautiful, wet eyes up to his face—and they were very beautiful in the soft moonlight—"I have been wanting to speak to you all day; and I have been so afraid. I wanted to ask you not to—not to go to Honduras—wont you give it up, if I ask you, Will?"

"Why should that trouble you, Dove? If I do go, it will only be a short trip; and

then it will be of great advantage to me in this way, that if——"

"But, Will, dear, listen to me for a moment," she said, with a piteous entreaty in her voice. "I know why you have always to go away from England, although you have been too kind-hearted to speak of it—I know it quite well—it's because I am to have the money that belongs to you, and you have to fight your way all by yourself, and leave your family year after year, and all because of me—and I wont have the money, Will—I hate it—and it's making me more miserable every day."

"Darling, don't distress yourself like that," he said, soothingly, for she was now crying very bitterly. "I assure you, you mistake the whole affair. I wont go to Honduras, if you like—I'll do anything you ask me. But really, Dove, I go abroad merely because, as I believe, one of my an-

cestors must have married a gipsy. I like to wander about, and see people, and live differently, and get generally woke up to what's going on in the world. Bless you, my darling, if it were money I wanted, I ought to have remained at home from the beginning. My father has only done what any well-thinking man would have done in his place—and you mustn't fret yourself about such a trifle——"

"I knew you would never acknowledge I was robbing you, Will; but I am. And all the time you were in Russia, and in Canada, whenever there was a heavy storm blowing, I used to lie awake at night and cry; because I knew it was I who had sent you away out there, and I thought you might be in a ship and in danger—all through me. And this morning, when you—when you said you were going to Honduras—I made up my mind then to go to papa to-morrow

morning, and I'll tell him I wont have the money—I'll go away from you altogether rather, and be a governess——"

"Now, now, Dove, don't vex me and yourself about nothing," he said to her, kindly. "I wont go to Honduras."

"You wont?"

"I wont."

She raised her head a little bit—in an entreating way — and the compact was sealed.

"I'll tell you what I shall do," he said, taking the hand that lay on his arm into his own. "I will stay at home, get myself into some regular work, take a small house somewhere near here, and then you'll come and be my wife, wont you, Dove?"

There was a slight pressure on his hand: that was her only answer. They walked on for some little time in silence; and then, catching a glimpse of her face, he stopped

to dry the tears from her cheeks. While engaged in that interesting occupation, she said to him, with a little smile—

"It looks as if *I* had asked *you*, Will—doesn't it?"

"I don't think so," he said.

"It wouldn't matter, if I did—would it?" she asked, simply. "For you know how fond I am of you, Will."

They talked of that and a good many other relevant matters until they had reached St. Mary-Kirby. They paused for a moment on the bridge—to look at the dark shadows about the mill and the white sheen of the moonlight on the water; and then she whispered timidly—

"When shall we be married, Will?"

"We shall be maghied whenever you like, Dove," he said, lightly and cheerfully.

CHAPTER VIII.

JULIET.

BY the time the "playing-in" farce was over, the house was quite full. That morning's paper had written in such a fashion about the new triumph of Miss Brunel on Saturday night, that long before the box-office was closed there was not a registered place in the building which had not been seized upon. Will foresaw what was likely to happen, and had asked Mr. Melton to secure him a box.

When the little party drove from the Langham—Will's rooms in town scarcely offering them the accommodation they re-

quired—Dove was in high spirits. It was the first time she had gone anywhere with the young gentleman opposite her since their "engagement;" and she already felt that comfortable sense of extended possession which married people enjoy. She took her seat in the brougham, which Count Schönstein had kindly placed at their disposal, with a new and fluttering pleasure; she already imagined herself to have the importance and the claims to attention of a wife; and she accepted Will's little courtesies in this light, and made herself very happy over the altered aspect of their relations.

When her opera-cloak had been hung up, and her tiny bouquet, opera-glass, and bill placed daintily before her, the graceful little woman ensconced herself in the corner, and timidly peeped round the curtain. She was dressed in a very faint blue silk, with sharp broad lines of white about it; and over and

through her rippling brown hair ran the strings of blue pearls which Count Schönstein had given her. Not even Mrs. Anerley, who saw her often enough, could forbear to look with a tender pride upon the girl; and as for Mr. Anerley, whose tall, upright figure was hid in the shadow of the box, he would fain have sat down beside his adopted daughter, with his arm round her waist, and forgot all about what they had come to see.

The orchestra finished its overture, borrowed from the delicate "Sonnambula" music, and the curtain rose. Dove was disappointed at not seeing Miss Brunel; and paid but little attention to the preliminary scenes.

Suddenly there was an extraordinary commotion throughout the house, and a burst of that fine, strong, thunderous music which artists love to hear—and then Dove

saw advance a girlish-looking creature with a calm, somewhat pale, and interesting face, and beautiful black hair. She was only girlish in the slightness of her figure: there was an artistic completeness in her motions and a self-possession in her bearing which gave her something of a queenly look. She wore a magnificent white satin dress, the train of which lay in splendid masses behind her; and down over this white and gold fell a black lace veil, partly hiding the rich hair and enclosing the clear, beautiful dark face. Dove was spell-bound by that face. It somehow suggested Italy to her, and blue skies, and music, and the passionate artistic warmth of the South. Nor was the illusion destroyed by the low chest-voice with which the girl replied to the questions of mother. And from that moment, Dove thought no more of Miss Brunel and Will's friend. She saw only Juliet, and followed

her sad story with an aching heart and a trembling lip.

During the matchless balcony-scene, Will saw this intense sympathetic emotion growing upon the girl. I believe it is considered to be the proper thing for young ladies to be able to turn round and smile compassionately to each other, when the tragic sadness on the stage is making the women in the pit sob bitterly, and raising great lumps in the throats of the men. It is a pretty accomplishment, in its way; and may be indicative of other qualities which these young persons are accused of possessing. Dove's emotional tendencies had never been educated, however; and in this balcony-scene, as I say, she watched the lovers with a painful interest, which wrote its varying story every moment on her face. The theatre was still as death. The scarcely-uttered tendernesses of Juliet were heard as

distinctly as if they had been breathed into one's ear; and the eyes of the audience drank in the trembling lights and shadows of her girlish passion with an unconscious delight and admiration. The abandonment of her affection, the reluctant declarations, the coy shrinkings, and piteous, playful, tender apologies were so blended as to make the scene an artistic marvel; and Dove sat "laughin' maist like to greet," as the old Scotch song says. Indeed she scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry with the delight—the absolute delight which this piece of true art gave her; and when at last Juliet had forced herself to the parting—

> "'Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone:
> And yet no farther than a wanton's bird;
> Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
> Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
> And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
> So loving-jealous of his liberty"—

when, lingeringly and sadly, she had with-

drawn from the balcony, Dove rose suddenly, and with a half-choked sob in her voice, said,

"Oh, Will, I should like so much to see her—and—and——"

"Kiss her," she had nearly said; but thinking it might be ridiculous, she stopped.

"It's against the rules, Dove," said Will, with a smile. "Besides, that isn't Miss Brunel you've been looking at; that is Juliet. Both are very nice ladies; but they are quite unlike each other."

Dove was terribly disappointed. She would like to have declared her conviction that Miss Brunel *was* Juliet, that she had every bit the same tenderness, and sweetness, and loveliness; but she was afraid her enthusiasm might make Mrs. Anerley laugh at her, and so she bore the rebuff patiently.

Presently, however, some one tapped at the box-door; and the next moment Will was introducing the manager, Mr. Melton, to his companions.

"My young friend here," said Will to Melton, while Dove's pretty face assumed an extra tinge of colour, "has been so much struck by Miss Brunel, that she would like to go and thank her personally."

Now Mr. Melton was in a very good humour. The house was crammed; there was almost no "paper" in it; and the prospect of a good run through the popularity of his new acquisition had warmed up his impassive nature into quite a pronounced geniality.

"Then you ought to introduce the young lady to Miss Brunel," said Mr. Melton, blithely. "If you like I'll take you round at the end of the act, when Miss Brunel will have a little 'wait.'"

"Will you go, Dove?" asked Will.

"Yes," she said timidly.

Just as the curtain fell upon the scene in Friar Lawrence's cell, at the end of the second act, Mr. Melton conducted Dove and Will down a tortuous little stone stair into a narrow passage, from which they entered into the wings. A noisy and prolonged recall was thundering throughout the house, and Miss Brunel was being led on to the stage by Romeo to receive renewed plaudits. When she returned and passed under the glare of the jets in one of the entrances, Will went forward to shake hands with her.

"I have to congratulate you again," he said.

"Thank you," she said simply.

There had been a pleased smile of welcome in her eyes when they met; and yet it seemed to him that there was a strange,

intense expression in her look which was not natural to it. Once or twice before he had seen her in the same circumstances; and invariably this unconscious, mesmeric intensity was present in her eyes. He explained it to himself by supposing that the emotional idealism of her assumed character had not quite died out of her yet.

Then she turned and saw Dove standing with Mr. Melton. Will begged to introduce his "sister;" and the brief ceremony was sufficiently singular. For a moment the dark, lambent eyes of Miss Brunel were fixed upon the fair young girl with a sort of hesitating look — an inquiring, apprehensive look which Will never forgot; then all at once she frankly extended her hand. Dove, a little frightened, approached and shook hands with her.

"Mr. Anerley has spoken to me about

you," said Annie Brunel; and Dove was conscious that the dark-haired girl before her knew her secret.

How singular it was to hear herself addressed in those low, rich tones which a few minutes ago were addressing Romeo in the moonlight! Dove almost felt herself enchanted; and could have believed at that moment that she herself belonged to the old, sad, sweet play which seems to contain everything that was ever uttered about man's love and woman's devotion.

"I must go down to my dressing-room now," said Miss Brunel to Dove. "Will you come with me, if you are curious to see the place? I will send some one round with you to your box afterwards."

Will saw that Dove would like to go, so he settled the proposal by telling her not to be in Miss Brunel's way; and then he and Melton returned to the front of the house.

Dove was now conducted by her companion down into the theatrical Hades which lies beneath the stage. She saw the figures of the carpenters gliding like the spirits of the damned through the dusky twilight; she saw the cumbrous woodwork, the machinery of the traps, and what not, rendered faintly visible by the glimmering jets; and then she was led into the bright little room which was appropriated to Miss Brunel's use.

"You may go home if you like, now, Sarah," said the latter to her dresser. "Mrs. Christmas is in the theatre, and will be here presently."

"Thank you, miss," said the tidy little woman, who immediately hurried away home to get supper ready for her husband, a gasman in the theatre.

It was the best single dressing-room in the place; but it was not a very grand

apartment. There was, however, a
length mirror at one end, which had
privately presented (with a hint as t
destination) by Count Schönstein to
Melton; and the manager had thought
the least *he* could do was to newly pape
little chamber. At present it was in a
of confusion which largely excited D
curiosity. The implements of stage
were displayed before her, on the floo
the table, and on the marble slab undern
the smaller looking-glass; and all ar
lay or hung divers articles of costume
ornament, the peculiarly bright mate
and prominent decorations of which
very new to her. But it needed on
glance at Juliet's clear, beautiful face t
that she required very little "making-
nor was Dove less surprised to find that
lace and similar little delicacies of the y
actress's costume were real and valuable

"My mother taught me to make all these things myself," she explained to Dove. "She was very particular about them; and used to say that when one meant to spend ones's life in a profession, one ought to have as much pride in wearing real lace on the stage as out of doors."

"And do you mean to spend all your life in your profession?" asked Dove, timidly.

"Yes; why not?" said the girl, with a smile.

"I—I don't know," stammered Dove, blushing dreadfully.

"Come, be frank with me," said Annie Brunel, taking the girl's hand in hers. "Don't you think it very wicked to be an actress?"

Dove was now forced to explain herself.

"I don't, indeed," she said. "But I couldn't help thinking that you are too

young and—and too pretty—to waste all your life in a theatre."

"Oh, nonsense," said Miss Brunel, laughing in a motherly sort of way. "I live only in the theatre. I find my life wasted whenever I go out of it, and spend my time in amusing myself like a child. I have nothing to interest me but the theatre; nothing to live for out of it; and it is only when I get into the spirit of my part that I feel myself all throbbing over with a delicious life. You don't understand that? Why, my very fingers tingle with enjoyment; I get quite a new warmth within me; and many a time I can't help laughing or crying quite naturally when the scene suggests it. I'm sure no one in front has half the delight in a play that I have. I scarcely see the wings, and the prompter, and the scene-shifters; I forget the abominable smell of gas; and I should like to keep on the cha-

racter for ever—if it is one that pleases me. When I get a new and unpleasant part, I hate acting. I feel as if I were doing exactly what Mrs. Christmas taught me; and that the people must be laughing at me; and I become afraid of the critics, and hope that I shan't forget the cues."

Here the call-boy came running to the door; Juliet was wanted for the second scene. She hastily departed; and Dove was left alone.

"How very friendly she must be with Will, to receive me so kindly, and talk to me so frankly," thought Dove; when it was her own pretty face that had won upon the young actress's heart.

The scene in Capulet's House is a short one, and Annie Brunel was speedily back in her room. She brought with her Mrs. Christmas; and the bright, white-haired little woman made a pert curtsey when she

was introduced, and said how sorry she was to hear that the young lady had been sitting alone. The next moment she was running into a series of ludicrous stories about the mistakes inexperienced people had made in trying to find their way about the theatre by themselves; and it must be confessed that her anecdotes were sometimes so very humorous that it was as well that only ladies heard them.

"And something of the same kind," she continued, with her merry little eyes sparkling, "happened to Mr. ——, the celebrated author, you know, with Nelly Featherstone, who is in this theatre at the present moment—or ought to be. You know, it was a benefit night, Miss—Hammersmith?—Yes, Miss Hammersmith; and there was a general hurry-scurry, and he had been left in the wings. He asked a super how he should get to Mr. Crimp,

(and it was his benefit, my dear, and he had several friends with him, all drinking in his room) and the man told him to go to the first dressingroom on the right when he went downstairs. But his right was our left, as you know, my dear; and there were in the first dressing-room on the left Nelly Featherstone and her sister, and another girl, all dressing as hard as ever they could for the burlesque. Nelly was 'Perseus,' and before she had got on her tights, she was in—in a transition state, shall we say, my dear?"

Here the merry little woman laughed until the tears ran down her withered grey cheeks. "And up to the door goes Mr. ——, and opens it without thinking. Oh, Lor! what a fright he must have got! Nelly screamed at the pitch of her voice, and fell into a chair, and screamed again; and her sister Jeanie (*she* had some clothes on) ran at the poor man, and said something very offen-

sive, and slammed the door in his face. Poor fellow, he nearly died of shame; and Nelly's scream told everybody of his blunder, and Crimp and all his friends shrieked over it—but not before him, my dear, for he was much too celebrated a man to be laughed at. Only he sent her next day an explanation and an apology through the manager, and as beautiful a bouquet as ever you saw; and he got a friend of his to write a lovely notice of her in the *Diurnal* itself, when old Yellowjaw's piece was—Mercy, gracious me! There's the call-boy again — run, Miss Annie!"

"Good-bye," said Miss Brunel, hurriedly, shaking hands with Dove. "I should like you to come often and see me."

She bent over her for a moment, kissed her lightly, and left.

"You know what that means?" said Mrs. Christmas to Dove. "That means that she

will speak to no one this night again until her part is finished. All the theatre knows her way, and humours her. It's when the genius is working on her—that's what I say; and I know it, for I've seen it in her mother. *There* was the sweetest woman you ever heard of—not very friendly, Miss, you know, in the way of talking of her own affairs—and it's nothing I could ever make out about her life before I knew her—but the sweetest creature! the tenderest creature! And she was such a rare good actress, too—but nothing like her daughter; she knew that, and used to sit and talk for hours—it was the only thing she would talk about—over what she expected Miss Annie to be. And once she said to me, with tears running down her face, 'I pray every night that my little girl may be kept always an actress; and that she may never look for happiness outside her own profes-

sion.' But it's a shame to keep you here, Miss, if you've never seen Miss Annie's 'Juliet;' she said I was to take you back to your box when you wished to go."

So once more Dove passed through the dismal region and worked her way upward to the light of the theatre. Her friends were astonished at her long absence; but they were too much enthralled by what was going on upon the stage to speak to her. And again Dove looked down upon that queenly little person with whom she had been talking; and could not explain to herself the strange sensation she then experienced. It seemed as if her visit to the dressing-room had been a trance; and that she had really been speaking with Juliet. In the dressing-room she had seen before her only a fine-looking, intellectual, and very courteous lady; but now, upon the stage, she could not see this lady at all.

She even lost the power of remembering her. Those jet-black tresses, those fine eyes, and that pale, beautiful forehead—above all, that rich, majestic voice—all these belonged to Juliet, were Juliet, and she knew that it was a Juliet in nature, if not in name, who had spoken to her, and taken her hand, and kissed her.

This is perhaps the severest test to which an artist can be put. When you know the writer of a book, you cannot help underestimating the book. You are familiar with the author's personality, his habit of thought, perhaps with the material on which he works; you think of him more than of his book; and nothing but the soundest and most concentrated effort will overcome the influence of this unwittingly unjust scrutiny. When you know an actor or an actress, you involuntarily search for himself or herself in the assumed character;

you look at the character from within, not from without; you destroy the illusion by a knowledge of its material elements. Nothing but the power of genius will force upon you under these circumstances the idealism which the artist is labouring to complete.

But Dove was an easy subject for the spiritual magnetism of art. Her keenly sympathetic nature vibrated to the least motion of the magician's hand; and when the passionate climax of Juliet's misery was reached, Dove had entirely lost self-control. For a little time she tried to retain her composure, although Mrs. Anerley saw her lips suddenly tremble when Juliet begged the friar to show her some means of remaining faithful to her husband—

> "And I will do it without fear or doubt,
> To live an unstain'd wife to my sweet love."

But in the final scene she quite broke down.

She rose and went to the back of the box, and stood in a corner, sobbing bitterly. Mr. Anerley drew her towards him; and tried to soothe her, in his quiet, kindly way.

"My darling, why should you vex yourself? You will see 'Juliet' alive in a few minutes."

"I know it well enough," she said, trying to assume her ordinary manner, "but it's very wrong for any one to write things like that, to make people cry."

"The naughty Shakespere shan't do it again, that he shan't," said Will, compassionately. "And as for Miss Brunel, who is most in fault—but here she comes!"

Will picked out of the corner the large bouquet which lay there; and returned in time to let it drop—nearly the first of a fine collection of similar tributes which welcomed the triumph of the young actress—almost at her feet. Romeo picked it up, along with

two others; she took this particular one and sent a single bright look so clearly up to the box, that a good many heads were turned thither. When Romeo had picked up the remaining bouquets, and when she had again and again bowed her acknowledgments of the cordial applause of the theatre, the girl with the pale face and the black hair retired, and the people calmed down.

"Now, Dove," said Will, "if you wish to be cheered up a bit before going, there is as absurd a farce as ever was written to follow. Shall we stay?"

"Just as you please, Will," said Dove, looking down.

The first of her new duties, she thought, was submission and obedience; and she hoped neither Mr. nor Mrs. Anerley noticed her little conjugal effort.

It was agreed, however, that they should go home at once; and Will went off to hunt

up Count Schönstein's brougham. In a short space of time they were seated in the Langham hotel, awaiting supper.

"And not the least pleasant part of a play," said Mr. Anerley, dogmatically, as he fingered one of his wine-glasses, "is the supper after. You come out of the gas and the heat into a cool, fresh room; and—and—waiter! bring some ice, please."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COUNT'S BROTHER.

ON that same evening the Herr Graf von Schönstein dined with his brother, Mr. John Hubbard, at his residence, Rose Villa, Haverstock Hill. The Count, since his grand accession to fortune, was not a frequent visitor at his brother's house; but when he did go there, he was treated with much deference and apparent kindness.

There was at dinner only the Count, his brother, his brother's wife, and her sister. When the two ladies rose to go into the drawing-room, Mrs. Hubbard said to the Count, who had sprung to the door:

"Pray don't leave us two poor creatures all to ourselves: you may smoke in the drawing-room whenever you please to come in."

"Jack," said the Count, returning to the table and pulling out his cigar-case, "that wife of yours is an angel."

And so she was an angel—that is, a being without predicates. She was a mild, colourless, pretty woman, never out of temper, never enthusiastic, absolutely ignorant of everything beyond drawing-room accomplishments, scarcely proud even of her smooth light-brown hair, her blue eyes, and rounded cheeks. She knew, of course, that there were few women of her age looked so well and so young; she did not know to attribute that rotundity and youthfulness of face to her easy temperament, her good disposition, and lack of brain. Mrs. John Hubbard was conscious of thinking seriously

he would remain unmarried and leave his large fortune to her eldest boy Alexander, a young gentleman of eight, who now, in Highland dress, was about to sit down to the piano and delight his mother and aunt with a *staccato* rendering of "La ci darem la mano."

There were reasons why Mrs. Hubbard should be disquieted upon this point.

"Quite an angel," said the Count, oracularly. "But we mustn't go into the drawing-room just yet. I want to talk to you, Jack, about that young lady, you know."

"Miss Brunel?"

"Yes. Will you mind my taking a glass of that pale port of yours with my cigar? I know it's a shame, but ——"

"Don't mention it, Fred, I wish you'd come oftener and try it."

John Hubbard straightened himself up in the wide easy-chair; and prepared to receive his brother's disclosures or questions on a matter which was deeply interesting to them both. John was very unlike his stout, pompous brother: a thin little man, with grey hair and grey eyes; troubled by a certain twitching of the eyebrows, and affected generally by a weak and extremely nervous constitution. An avaricious man who sees his younger brother become possessed of thirty thousand a year which he himself expected to get, generally exhibits other than fraternal feelings; but whatever John Hubbard may have felt, the fact remains, that so soon as his brother Frederick became the undoubted owner of this money, he, John, began to observe towards him a severe deference and courtesy. When the Count

went to dine at Rose Villa, there were no tricks played upon him in the matter of wine. The claret-cup was not composed of "sudden death," at ten shillings a dozen, with a superabundance of water, and cucumber peel instead of borage. The dry sherry was not removed with the fish, in the hope that the dulled after-dinner palate might accept some Hambro' decoction with equanimity. One wine was pretty much the same as another wine to the Count von Schönstein; but he was pleased to know that his brother thought so much of him as to be regardless of expense.

"Are you quite sure, Jack," said the younger brother, drawing his chair near, "that nobody, beyond those you mentioned to me, knows who Miss Brunel is?"

"As far as I know, Fred; as far as I know," said the other, in an injured que-

rulous tone. "I can't hold myself responsible, and I'm not infallible."

"In a matter of this kind," said the Count, smiling benignly, "most people seem to think that Cayley and Hubbard are infallible. They say you are the repositories of all the scandals of the aristocracy; and that you might turn England upside down by publishing what you know. But I daresay that's exaggerated. Now don't you think that some one who remembers that story of twenty-five years ago and happens to see Miss Brunel, might recognise the resemblance between her and her mother, and then begin to inquire into the affair?"

There was a strong twitching of John Hubbard's eyebrows. He was far from being a good-tempered man; and to be compelled to sit and play the hypocrite was almost too much for him. He saw clearly whither these questions tended. He knew

his brother's ruling passion; he knew there was nothing he would not do to be admitted among those people who had refused to recognise his purchased title. Again and again he had inwardly cursed his folly in telling the Count the story of Annie Napier and her daughter; that breach of professional confidence was likely to lose his family thirty thousand a year. Can one conceive a more tantalizing position for a narrow-minded and avaricious man to assume than the involuntary prompting and guidance of a scheme which is likely, in the most gratuitous way, to deceive his own most dearly cherished hopes? If some one else had suggested to the Count a marriage with Miss Brunel as a possible passport to society, John Hubbard would not have been so chagrined. He would have been able to dissuade his brother from the step with such reasons as he could discover. But he had

himself told the Count the real history of Annie Brunel; he was compelled to furnish him with all sorts of information; and saw, through his own instrumentality, that money slipping out of his fingers which otherwise might have been his or his son's.

"I have explained it to you before, Fred," he said, patiently. "Old Mr. Cayley, who went out to America to see the Marquis of Knottingley's wife, lives down in Suffolk, where he is not likely to meet people who have much interest in Miss Brunel. Besides, he has a very fine sense of honour in these matters, and would not break a pledge he gave to Miss Brunel's mother, not to seek in any way to induce her daughter to leave the stage. And you know the people who knew of the marriage were very few; and most of them are dead. Mr. Palk is in his dotage, and lives in Westmoreland. Then who is likely to re-

member Miss Napier's appearance; or to perceive a likeness between her and Miss Brunel beyond the casual likenesses which occur constantly on the stage? I believe I could count on my ten fingers all the people who know who Miss Brunel really is. There's my wife—one; old Mr. Cayley—two; Cayley, my partner — three; you yourself——"

He stopped; for his brother was evidently not listening to him. So pre-occupied was the Count, indeed, that he broke the ash off the end of his cigar upon the edge of his wine-glass, allowing the ash to fall into the port.

"I hope I haven't poisoned you with some of my wines," said John Hubbard, with a thin laugh.

"I beg your pardon!" said his brother, reaching over for another glass, "I really didn't know what I was about. The whole

affair seems to me so romantic and impossible—like a play, you know, or something of that sort. I can scarcely believe it; and yet you lawyer fellows must sometimes meet with such cases."

"I have one of my people down in Southend just now, trying if he can trace anything about a woman and her child who, we believe, lived there eighteen years ago. If we find her, a curious story will come out. But I never in the whole course of my life heard of any woman, except Miss Napier, who refused a title and a fortune, which were by right her own. I suppose the common-sense of actresses gets poisoned by the romantic sentiment in which they live and breathe."

"If you mean as regards money," said the Count, with a patronising smile, "I can assure you that most actresses have an uncommonly small proportion of sentiment

and a very tolerable share of sense. Miss Brunel's mother must have been an extraordinary woman in many respects—what you and I would consider a fool, though many people would give her folly a fine name. Now, about revealing this secret to Miss Brunel, don't you think some of the Marquis's relatives might do that?"

"They would cut their fingers off first," said John Hubbard with nervous decision. "They knew every action of her mother after she left this country—so old Mr. Cayley told me; they now watch her daughter closely, and try to discover everything they can about her; and their intensest hope is that she may never learn what a splendid property lies at her command, so that it may revert to them or their heirs, as the will directs. And what a property it is, Fred!"

"Ah! I suppose so," said the Count, with a sigh.

To do him justice, he did not consider so much as another might have done the money he would get by marrying Miss Brunel: his desire to marry her was wholly selfish, but the selfishness was begotten of no greed of money.

"The trustees are as diligent in looking after the property as though it were to be given up to-morrow. And how those rents accumulate! It was Lord Belsford who proposed to use up some of the money in buying off the mortgages which still hung over the Northamptonshire estate from the time of the Marquis's father; and now that has been done, it is nothing but a huge machine turning out money for nobody's use."

The little, nervous lawyer seemed to be quite overwhelmed by the contemplation of

such a thing. If *he* had had the option of becoming the proprietor of this valuable coining machine, he would not have allowed the opportunity to pass. And even now it occurred to him that in the event of his brother marrying Miss Brunel, and acquiring this vast wealth, the Count might, out of gratitude for the service done him in the matter, leave his 30,000*l.* a year to the young gentleman in the adjoining drawing-room. The alternative was possible, but it was remote; John Hubbard would vastly have preferred his brother remaining unmarried.

"You know why I am so anxious to know all about this matter, Jack," said the Count, uneasily.

His brother nodded.

"It is a hazardous thing—seems to me almost impossible," continued the Count; and he was never tired of reiterating his

doubts on the subject, "that such a fortune and title should belong to anybody without their knowing it."

"It was her mother's wish," said John Hubbard.

"Oh, I know," said the Count, "that she has been brought up to regard with apprehension every one out of her profession; and I know she believes that under no circumstances ought she to leave the stage. And yet I fancy she will not be very grateful either to her mother, or to old Mr. Cayley, or to the trustees, for keeping her in ignorance of her good fortune. And if she should consent to be my wife, she will probably accuse me of having used the secret for my own purpose."

The Count spoke as if such an accusation would do him a great injury. But the possibility of the future he had chalked out for himself drove away this ugly after-

thought. He became quite excited. His face was flushed; his hand trembled as he lifted his glass.

"God knows," he said, earnestly, "that it is not her money I want. I'm not a fortune-hunter."

"You have a lot of money," said his brother, gently; while he watched his face with those mild grey eyes. "If you were to marry Miss Brunel, you could afford to part with what you have now."

"What do you take me for?" said the Count, with a touch of virtuous indignation. "If I were to marry Miss Brunel, I should insist on her settling all her money on herself. I have enough to live upon, thank God!"

John Hubbard's mind was made up on the spot.

"You will never marry Miss Brunel, Fred," he said, quietly.

"Why?" said the other, suddenly putting down the glass he had been lifting.

"Simply because her relatives on the father's side wont allow it."

"You said they——"

"They are content to say nothing while they hope to secure the reversion of the property through Miss Brunel's dying intestate," said John Hubbard, calmly, though his eyebrows were twitching nervously. "When, however, they understand that you, a brother of mine, and therefore likely to know how matters stand, are about to marry Miss Brunel, they will inform her of her true position, and implore her not to marry a man beneath her in rank. And you know, Fred, they will be able to point to your previous silence as a witness against you."

The first impulse of Count Schönstein was to dart an angry glance at the pale,

quiet little man before him, as though the latter had dealt him an unprovoked blow; then, when he saw in his brother's calm face only corroborative testimony of the appalling truth he had uttered, the Count leant back in his chair, unable to conceal his fright and dismay.

At that moment, Master Alexander entered the room, and said—

"Please, Uncle Frederick, mamma says coffee is in the drawing-room, and will you come and have some?"

"Yes, yes, my boy," said the Count, jumping up from his chair.

He scarcely knew what he was about. John Hubbard rose also, and then they walked into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Hubbard saw something in her brother-in-law's face which she not unnaturally, but quite wrongly, attributed to his having taken too much wine.

Miss Fleet, Mrs. Hubbard's sister, was singing one of Claribel's inanities, expressing her wish that the laird might marry the lady of high degree, and declaring that, for her part, she would sooner dance upon the green with Donald. Miss Fleet's voice trembled consciously when the Count entered the room. She was a fine, roseate, country-looking woman of twenty-six or twenty-seven, much coarser and stouter than her elder sister; and she sang with those broad alternations of *piano* and *forte* which some girls, and nearly all actresses, consider to be effective. Miss Fleet, now that the Count had come in, simply roared in the louder passages, and then subsided into an almost inaudible whisper when she meant to be particularly tender.

"Thank you, thank you," said the Count, absently, when she had finished; but her ear detected no particular emphasis in the

words for which she had been waiting.

Rose Villa was not a large place, but it possessed the advantage of being enclosed; and from the drawing-room one could slip out into a small garden which was quite surrounded and guarded by a row of trees. The Count sate at the French window leading out into this garden; and was so forgetful of all common politeness as to stare persistently out into the darkness, where the tall black trees were grouped in masses against the faint, twinkling sky.

Like a government suddenly knocked out of its reckoning by an adverse vote, he "wished to consider his position." There had been plenty of difficulties in the way before; but this last stumbling-block so cruelly pointed out by his brother seemed the most irremovable of all. In a moment of temporary spleen, he was almost ready

to give the whole thing up; and return to——

Then a vision of that lonely great house near St. Mary-Kirby arose before him, and he shrank from the weariness and dulness of his life there, from the restless hoping against hope which he had pursued there, from the constant disappointments following his best directed efforts.

If he were to marry the girl, would not his path be clear? Beautiful in person, graceful in manner, with an intellect a thousand times superior to that of any woman she was likely to meet, he would have every reason to be proud of his wife; and then, as the husband of Lady Annie Ormond, the only daughter of the Marquis of Knottingley, and the owner of those fine estates which had such tempting shooting, would not their friendship be sought after and valued by the very persons who now, taking their cue

from the Lord Chamberlain, doubtless, were graceless enough to look upon him as an interloper or adventurer?

Not by means of any chain of philosophic reasoning, but through a bitter experience, Count Schönstein had arrived at the conclusion that a large sum of money, *per se*, was not happiness. It was doubtless very well that he could have the finest wines and cigars, drive in comfortable vehicles, and be unhampered in spending money ostentatiously; but even when he was only a tea-broker, he had a modest brougham, such wine and cigars as he required, and spent quite as much in fashionable charities as he did now. He had found out that a man cannot, by doubling his income, eat two dinners a day instead of one. With thirty-thousand a year he could drink no more wine than was possible to him when his annual income was to be counted in hundreds.

Consequently he got tired of material pleasures which could not be increased; and sometimes he even ceased to enjoy boasting of the high prices he paid for such luxuries as he used. Like every other human being, he was forced to fix his desires upon something he did not possess; and he stupidly chose a difficult thing. Unaided, he might as well have sought to get up a crusade among Scotchmen for the restoration of the sacred stone which now rests in Westminster Abbey. He had set his heart upon gaining admission to the aristocracy; and the moon for which he cried was to be reached by no ladder of his making.

Mrs. Hubbard thought he was ill. Having attentively but covertly regarded him for some time, she went to her husband, who was getting himself another cup of coffee.

"John," she whispered, "has your brother

been drinking Miss Betham's sherry by mistake?"

"No, my dear: how could he? There was none on the table."

Off goes Master Alexander to his uncle.

"Uncle Frederick, mamma wants to know if you've been drinking Miss Betham's sherry."

"If you will tell me who Miss Betham is, I shall be able to——"

"Don't you know Miss Betham, our governess? She has some sherry every day for lunch, and nobody else will take the sherry that's kept for her, and——"

"Never mind the boy," said John Hubbard, coming hastily forward, with an awkward laugh. "It was only a joke. I said you looked as dull as though you'd been drinking Miss Betham's sherry; we *do* keep a light, wholesome wine for her, and for the servants, when they get ill, you know."

Master Alexander said nothing; but he

resolved to inform Miss Betham of the "crammer" his papa had made use of. Nor did uncle Frederick care to ask how a light and wholesome wine (which in reality would have blushed at the sight of a grape) was likely to have made him ill.

The Count rose abruptly, opened the glass door, and, without a word of apology to the ladies, beckoned his brother to follow. They passed out into the garden, and the Count began to pace heavily up and down the gravelled pathway under the trees.

"I can't afford to give up this so easily as you seem to think, Jack," he said; and he spoke roughly and angrily.

"I always knew you had a strong will, Frederick," said his brother, gently.

"I've set my heart on it, I tell you. What's the use of my money to me? D——n it, Jack, I might as well be down in Thames-street again."

"Few people would grumble if they had your good luck," said the elder brother, in his mildest voice.

"I don't care what few people, or what many people, would do. I know that when I make up my mind to a thing, I stick to it; and instead of you sitting quietly by and throwing obstacles in my way, the least you ought to do would be to help me."

"You're very unfair, Fred," said John Hubbard, in an injured tone; "wasn't I the first to tell you about Miss Brunel? And now——"

"And now you try to throw cold water on the whole affair. But I am not a child. Miss Brunel's friends may be very aristocratic and very fine; but they have not all the power in their hands. Look here, Jack, what's to prevent my marrying Miss Brunel before they know anything about it;

and after the marriage is over they may make what disclosures they please. I shall be beforehand with them."

"Are you sure that Miss Brunel will marry you, Fred?" said his brother, insidiously.

The Count laughed out, in his stormy and contemptuous way.

"Your brain has been turned, Jack, by hearing of that one actress who refused a lot of money. Take my word for it, you will never hear of another. If I offer Annie Brunel Balnacluith Place, my house in Bayswater, the place over in Baden, what horses and carriages she pleases, with as much company at home and gadding about abroad as she can wish for, I am not very apprehensive about her answer. When we were younger, Jack, we could have imagined some Joan of Arc declining these things; but now we know better."

"It is a strong temptation," said his brother, absently: he did not like to say how very certain he considered Annie Brunel's acceptance of the offer.

"And besides," added the Count, with virtuous warmth, "I do not think I flatter myself when I look upon the money as not the only inducement. I'll make as good a husband to her as any one I know; and I don't think my disposition is quarrelsome or niggardly. And besides, Jack, she must remember that it is not every one who would marry an actress, and consent never to look into her past life, which in the case of an actress must have been made up of a good many experiences, you know. Of course I don't mean to depreciate her. She is doubtless a very honest, and good, and ladylike girl; but still—she mustn't expect too much."

And the Count was quite honest in

making this ingenuous speech. He rather considered himself a praiseworthy person in stooping to this unequal match. He had not the least perception of the selfishness of the view he took of the whole matter. It was quite natural to him to think only of his own ends and purposes, and he took no shame to himself for it. He never for a moment regarded the scheme from her point of view, nor stayed to inquire what might be the possible results of it where she was concerned. He did not even consider what her regard for him would probably be after she discovered the reasons which had induced him to marry her; nor that she was likely to have little respect for a man who had played upon her ignorance to further his own designs. The Count was conscious of acting quite honestly (to his own nature); and never thought that any one would accuse him of deceit in so doing.

CHAPTER X.

MISS BRUNEL AT HOME.

WILL ANERLEY did not forget his promise to visit Annie Brunel, but he seemed in no hurry to fulfil it. Had he been a young man about town, the temptation of having something special to say at his club or at dancing parties about the new actress, of whom everybody was talking, would have proved too much for him. When a man, however, spends most of his dancing years abroad, and gets a good deal knocked about the world, he ceases to long for the petty celebrity of social gossip, and has no great desire to become a temporary

hero among a lot of well-meaning but not very profound people, who are sure to mispronounce his name and take him for somebody else.

It happened one morning, however, that he had been invited to breakfast with a noble lord, then in the government, who was desirous of getting some special information wherewith to confound an opposition member who had given notice of his intention to ask a particularly ugly question in the House. His lordship thanked Will heartily for his kindness, hoped he might be able to return the service in some slight way; hinted something about a day's fishing if Anerley happened to be in the neighbourhood of a place of which he had never heard before; and then proceeded to get in order the catapult with which he hoped that evening to demolish the indiscreet member.

Having nothing particular to do just

then, Will thought he would take a stroll in Kensington Gardens, and proceeded to take a short cut in that direction. Passing a little *cul-de-sac* of a street, which had not above half-a-dozen houses on each side, it struck him that the name on the wall was familiar to him. He then remembered that this was the place in which Annie Brunel lived; and thinking the occasion very opportune, he turned the corner and walked down to the proper house. They were very pretty little houses, with white pillars and porticoes draped with Virginian creepers, and with a good many trees around them. Miss Brunel had been fortunate enough to get the offer of one of these houses, furnished, at a moderate rent, and she and Mrs. Christmas had decided at once to accept it. It was a quiet little place, pleasantly situated, with a tolerably large garden behind.

Will passed inside the gate, and was

about to ascend the steps, when the door above was opened, and a young lady came out of the house. Somehow he fancied he had seen her before—where, he knew not. She was rather an attractive-looking little person, with a pert, slightly up-turned nose, big and rather wicked blue eyes, short, loose brown curls, and a decided look of violet-powder about her forehead and neck. The saucy bright eyes looked at Will for a moment with a bold, familiar glance, and there was a shadow of a smile on her pretty lips.

Of course he took off his hat, and muttered something like "Good morning."

"Good morning," she said, holding out her hand, and looking at him with those dangerous blue eyes. "Don't you remember me?"

The moment he heard the voice, he recognised it. It was the thrilling voice of

"Perseus," of "Good-for-nothing" Nan, of "Peggy Green," of "The Little Rebel," of "Mrs. White," of "Fatima," of "Rose Dufard"—of Nelly Featherstone. Had her eyelashes been caked with cosmetique, her lips reddened with salve, and the violet-powder of her face tempered with glycerine and rouge, he would have recognised her at once; but there was a good deal of difference between Miss Featherstone in morning costume, with cold daylight on her face, and Miss Featherstone in the dashing and glittering garments of "Conrad the Corsair," with the glare of the footlights on her forced complexion and brilliant ornaments. For the rest, he had only heard of her as a good and well-meaning little girl, to whom nature had given a deadly pair of eyes, and a warm temperament. He was at first rather taken aback by her proffered friendship; but a few commonplaces relieved him from the

predicament. She gave him a parting smile full of sweetness; and he went up to the door, and entered the house, leaving his card with the servant.

Presently Mrs. Christmas entered the drawing-room, and said that Miss Brunel would be glad to see him out in the garden, where she was then engaged.

"You seem to have been ill, Mrs. Christmas," said Will. "I hope that wild adventure upon Hounslow Heath had nothing to do with it."

"Indeed, I'm afraid it had, Mr. Anerley," said the little woman, whose bright eyes were unnaturally bright, her face also being unusually pale. "I have never been well since—but old folks like me mustn't complain, you know, Mr. Anerley. We mustn't complain if we get ill at times."

"I'm sorry you've been ill. You ought to go and live in the warm, fresh air of

the country, when the summer's fully in."

"I've never left Miss Annie for a day since her mother died, Mr. Anerley; and I'm not going to forsake her now. It would be hard on both of us."

"But she might go with you."

"That's easy saying."

They went out, and crossed a little bit of lawn, which had a few vases upon it, and here and there a plot of spring annuals. A short distance down the side path they came to a small summer-house, which was arched over with a piece of light framework, and in front of this framework stood Annie Brunel, on a chair, tying up with loops of string the bright-leaved creepers which were yet in their erratic youth. Her hands were busy over her head, and her face was upturned, showing the fine outline of her neck and figure — a shapeliness of bust which was

not lessened by a tight-fitting and pretty morning dress, which Will thought the most graceful thing he had ever seen, particularly as it caught streaks of sunlight now and again through the diamond spaces above.

When he went up to her and shook hands with her, he fancied he observed a slight tinge of embarrassment in her face; but that quickly wore off, and she returned to her usual bright happiness of manner, continuing her work by fits and snatches. And every position into which her beautiful figure fell seemed more admirable than its predecessor.

"I wonder," thought Will, "if any man ever lifted her down from the saddle; and did he immediately die of joy?"

Perhaps he was sorry at the moment that one's descent from a chair is so obviously an easy feat.

"I'm doing this out of pure mischief,"

she said, "and earning for myself such heaps of muttered scolding and ill-will. The gardener comes to us twice a week; and he is quite savage if I have meddled with anything in the meantime. I can't pacify him. I have tried every means; but he is too obdurate. Miss Featherstone says I ought to hire a young gardener, and I might have the garden done any way I wished."

"Sulky servants are always the best servants," said Will, rather absently; for the clear, dark, Italian face, and the bright smile, and the white teeth oppressed him with a vague, delicious melancholy. "But a gardener, whether he is good or bad, is always sulky. My mother is afraid to touch one of the plants in the green-house until it is half-withered; and when some people come, and she carries off a lot of the plants for the hall and dinner-table, she trembles to meet the old man next morning.

I suppose gardeners get so fond of their flowers as to be jealous, and jealousy is always cross. By the by, wasn't that Miss Featherstone who left as I came in?"

"Yes."

"I scarcely knew her. In fact, I only saw her once before off the stage—at that supper; and yet she was kind enough to bid me good morning."

"Then she must have thought you were a newspaper gentleman," said Mrs. Christmas, with a good-natured little laugh. "She is very partial to them. And that one she knows just now teaches her such dreadful things, and the heedless girl repeats them wherever she goes, to make people laugh. What was it she said this morning, Miss Annie?—that on St. Patrick's day there were so many wicked things done in Ireland, that the recording angel had to take to short-hand."

"Well, Lady Jane," said Miss Brunel, "you need not have repeated what she said; and it's very wrong of you to say anything against poor Nelly, who is a warm-hearted, mad little creature."

"She's not so simple as she looks," said Mrs. Christmas, nodding her head sagaciously. "I am an old woman, and I know. And the way she uses that poor young gentleman—him in the government office, who was at the supper, you know, Mr. Anerley—is downright shameful. She told me this morning that he made her swear on an open prayer-book never to put bismuth on her arms or neck again; I suppose because he expects to marry her, and doesn't want to have her all shrivelled up, and bismuth is very bad, you know, for that; and that newspaper gentleman whom she knows said, whenever she wanted to quarrel with the poor young man, and make him believe that

she had perjured herself all for the love of shiny white arms, she ought to——"

"Mr. Anerley," said the young girl, looking down from her work, "will you silence that talkative child by giving it a piece of sugar? What must you think of us actresses if she goes on like that?"

"*She*—bah!" said the old woman, in a melodramatic whisper, with a nod towards Miss Brunel. "She knows no more of Nelly Featherstone and the rest of 'em than an infant does. They don't talk to her like they do to an old woman like me."

"Now I have finished," said the young lady, jumping lightly down from the chair (Will did not even get the chance of taking her hand), "and we'll go inside, if you please."

"Shall I bring in the chair?" asked Will.

"Oh no. We leave the old thing out here: it is for no other use."

Somehow it seemed to be quite a valuable chair in his eyes: he would have given a good deal to be its owner just then.

As they got in-doors, Mrs. Christmas went upstairs, and Will followed Annie Brunel into the drawing-room, which was rather prettily furnished, and had a good deal of loose music scattered about the tables and piano. He had been in finer drawing-rooms, with grander ladies; and yet he had never before felt so rough and uncultivated. He wished he had looked particularly at his hair and moustache before coming out, and hoped they were not very matted, and loose, and reckless—which they certainly were. Indeed, he looked like some stalwart and bronzed seaman who had just come off a long voyage, and who seemed to regard with a sort of wonder the little daintinesses of land-life.

"I thought you had quite run away with

my sis—— with that young lady, the other evening when she went to see you," he said.

"You would have been sorry for that," she replied, with a quiet smile.

Will was not at all so pleased with the gentle, motherly tone in which she uttered these words as he ought to have been. She seemed to take it for granted that his love-secret was known to her; he would have preferred—without any particular reason—its not being known.

"What a gentle, loveable girl she is!" continued the young actress. "I never knew any one who so thoroughly won me over in a few minutes. She was so sweet, and quiet, and frank; one could tell by her face everything she thought. She must be very sensitive and affectionate; I hope so tender a creature will never have to suffer much. And you—you must be very proud of her."

"We all are."

Miss Brunel widened her eyes slightly, but said nothing.

"By the way," said Will, with an evident effort, "I gathered together a number of Suabian peasant-songs when I was out there, which I should like to hear you sing. I know you will like them, they are so tender and simple. Dove has tried one or two of them, but her voice is scarcely low and full enough for them——"

"Dove is your *sister's* name, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And how do you know I can sing at all?" she asked, with a smile.

"As well ask a star if it has light," said he, warmly.

"You have lived too long in the East," she retorted, gently.

When Mrs. Christmas came into the room at that moment, there was a slight constraint visible upon both the young people. Will

felt that he had gone a little too far; while Annie Brunel seemed to think that she had rather rudely warned him off such dangerous ground. The danger was not in the words; but in his tone.

Mrs. Christmas had just received an East London local paper, in which some youthful poet had poured forth his rhapsodies over Annie Brunel and her "Juliet." There was nothing remarkable in the verses, except that the author hoped to meet Miss Brunel in heaven. This was natural enough. The almost inevitable climax of a commonplace poem is heaven, simply because heaven is the only idealism of commonplace minds. It is almost a matter of necessity, therefore, that hymns should end with "above," or "Eden," or "Paradise;" and that magazine poets should lay down their pen with a sigh of relief when they have left their readers somewhere among the fixed stars.

"It is kind of him to suppose that an actress may get to heaven at all," said Annie Brunel, when Mrs. Christmas had read the verses.

Once or twice before Will had remarked this tendency towards bitterness of feeling in the young girl's contemplation of the non-professional world. He could not divine its cause. He was vexed to see it; and now he said boldly—

"You ought not to speak like that, Miss Brunel. You wrong both yourself and those of whom you speak. You really have imbibed, I don't know how, a singular prejudice against people out of your own profession."

"Don't they refuse in France to bury actors in consecrated ground?"

"If they did, the freaks of a clergy should never be blamed upon the people of any country. I suppose the priests, through the

use of the confessional, were so dismayed about the prospects of their charge in the next world, that they thought this distinction the only piece of worldly consolation they could give them. But indeed, Miss Brunel, you must abandon that touch of Bohemianism which you unconsciously allow to escape you sometimes, and which is unfair to——"

"I wont have you argue for these people," she said, audaciously. "I was glad you came here this morning, for I want to win you over to us. Didn't I say, Lady Jane, when I first met him, that he was so unlike the other—what shall I call them? — outsiders. Well, perhaps it is foolish of me to talk about these people, for I know nothing whatever of them; but I have been educated to consider them as so much raw material to be deluded and impressed by stage-effect, and I shall never be

able to regard them as anything else than strangers. Haven't you seen the little girl in pink cotton and spangles who stands by while her father is performing tricks before a lot of village-people? Haven't you seen her watch all the faces round, calculating the effect of the performance, and wondering how much it will produce in halfpence? No, you needn't laugh: that is precisely my attitude and feeling towards the public."

"You may tell that to one who has never seen you on the stage," said Will. "I *know* that you have no more thought of calculating the effect of what you are doing than the music of a violin has."

"That is because I am then a performer myself, and have to attend to my business. When I stand in one of the entrances, and hear the buzz of the theatre, I say to myself, 'My big children up there in the boxes, you have paid so much to be amused, and

you don't care much for me; but in a few minutes I'll have you all as quiet as mice, and in a few minutes more I'll have the prettiest and best among you crying.'"

"My poor Dove's eyes were tremulous all the evening after seeing you," he said.

"I like to hear you speak kindly of her," she replied, looking him straight in the face with her clear and frank eyes. "She will need all the tenderness that friends can give her to make her life a happy one."

Will felt a dull sense of pain at his heart (why, he knew not) on hearing these true and touching words: somehow he fancied there was a sympathy almost prophetic in them.

"Come," she said, briskly, as she rose and went to the piano, "I am going to put you to the test. I make all my new friends submit to it; and accordingly as they pass through it, I regard them afterwards. I

am going to play three funeral marches, Handel's, Beethoven's, and Mendelssohn's. When the person experimented on prefers a certain one of them, I consider her—I have not tried the experiment on a gentleman as yet—merely emotional and commonplace: therefore I don't care much for her. If she likes a certain other one, I think she is rather more intellectual, with some dramatic sensitiveness; and then I like her a good deal better. When she likes the third, though, I think she must have the divinest sympathies, and I am ready to fall in love with her."

She had sat down to the piano.

"But the peril of failure is too great; I dare not risk it," said Will. "It is as hard a trial as the three caskets in the 'Merchant of Venice;' only, if the prize were to be the same, the chance——"

He had spoken quite thoughtlessly; but

he saw in a moment, by the pain and confusion of the young actress, what a blunder he had made.

"Pray don't mind what I said, Miss Brunel," he urged. "I was talking to you without thinking, as I should have talked to Dove. I will submit to the three funeral marches, if you like——"

"I will spare you," she said, good-naturedly. "If you had some of your Suabian songs here just now, I should sing them to you. But really it seems a pity to use up such fine weather in-doors: are you particularly engaged to-day?"

"I have no engagement if I can be of service to you."

"Mr. Anerley, I am neither a bulbul nor a gazelle. Shall I be trespassing on your time if I ask you to take a walk with me?"

"No."

"Lady Jane—Mrs. Christmas, I mean—

and I take a stroll under the trees in Kensington Gardens every forenoon when I have no rehearsal."

"And I," said Will, "was on my way to the same place, for the same purpose, when I happened to see the name of the street, and thought I might venture to trespass on your patience."

So she went and dressed; and then together they passed out into the open air and the sunlight.

Will Anerley left that house a very different man from him who had entered it an hour and a half before. Nor was he conscious of the change.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE PARK.

HE was conscious only of a decided and subtle pleasure in listening to the talk of this young girl, in watching the varying expression of her face, in admiring her beautiful eyes. The easy and graceful friendship they both seemed to entertain for each other was the simplest, most natural thing in the world. There could be no danger in it. Anerley's life had been too full of action to give him the deadly gift of introspection; but in no possible mood of self-analysis could he have regarded the temporary satisfaction of being near to, and talking with,

the young actress as anything else than a pleasant and ordinary and harmless accident. He never for a moment dreamed of its producing any great result. Had the thing been suggested to him, he would have replied that both he and she understood each other perfectly: they had plenty to think of in life without indulging in folly: they had their separate work and interests and duties, and the casual pleasure they might obtain by meeting as acquaintances was nobody's concern but their own.

The first attitude of affection is exclusiveness. When one sees two young people sending glances across a dinner-table which are intelligible to themselves alone, when one perceives them whispering to each other while elsewhere the talk is general; when one observes them, on opposite sides at croquet, missing hoops, and slipping balls, and playing to aid each other in the most

gratuitous, open, and unblushing manner, it needs no profound divination to detect a secret copartnership between them. Two quite unselfish lovers immediately become selfish in their united position of antagonism to the rest of the world. And when the girl is pretty, the rest of the world consider such selfishness to be simply hateful.

These two young people, who were not lovers, nor had any intention of becoming lovers, walked up Victoria Road, and so made their way into the cool green shadow of the great elms and leafy lindens which make Kensington Gardens so delightful a lounge. It was now May—the only month in which London trees seem to look cheerful —and the weather was at its freshest and best.

"Mr. Melton proposes to close the theatre in a week or so," said Annie Brunel, "for a month, in order to have it done up anew.

He is very anxious that I should not accept any engagement for that month; and I have been thinking I ought to take Mrs. Christmas down to the seaside, or perhaps over to the warm banks of the Rhine for a week or two. Did you remark how very poorly she is?"

"I did," said Will. "I asked her about it. She seems to fancy that our madcap journey to Hounslow Heath brought the attack on."

"The grass was so wet, you know. I blame myself for it all; and indeed there's nothing I wouldn't do for the dear old creature. She was my only companion and friend for many a year."

"Wont you find it very dull going away all by yourselves?"

"Well, no. She is never dull. I never tire of her society a moment; she is so full of vivacity and kindliness and funny stories; but I do not like the idea of our going away

anywhere alone. Hitherto, you know, I have always been in a manner compelled to go by an engagement."

"Bring her down to St. Mary-Kirby, and let Dove and you go about with her."

"Thank you. You have told me so much of that quiet little valley, and the quiet way of living there, that I should feel like an evil spirit invading paradise."

"Now, now—you are at it again," he said, laughing. "I wont have you malign our honest country folks like that. My mother would make you her daughter: she has a general faculty for making pets of everybody. And my father would give you a touch of the old squire-like courtesy he sometimes brings out when he is very grand and polite to some London young lady who came down to see us."

She only smiled in reply—a trifle sadly.

"I should like to see a little of that

peaceful sort of life—perhaps even to try it. Day after day to be always the same, always meeting the same people, always looking out on the same trees and fields and river, and hoping only for some change in the weather, or for a favourable turn to the fortunes of one's pet hero. But then other cares must come. That gentle little Dove, for instance, isn't she sitting just now wondering when you will come to see her, and getting quite vexed because you stay so long away?"

"You seem to have a great affection for Dove," he said.

"Haven't you?"

"Well of course; who could help it?"

"If I were a man I should not try to help it; I should be prouder of the love of such a girl than of anything under heaven."

Such conversations are not common between young unmarried people, but neither

of these two seemed to consider it strange that they should so talk; for indeed Annie Brunel assumed towards Will an amusingly matter-of-fact, kindly, almost maternal manner; so much so that, without hesitation, she would have told him that a little more attention to the brushing of his rough brown hair and moustache might not have been inappropriate before visiting a lady. Sometimes he was amused, sometimes tantalized by this tone. He was a man verging towards thirty, who had all his wits about him, who had seen plenty of the world and knew far more of its ways and beliefs and habits than he would have liked to reveal to his companion then beside him; and he could scarcely refrain from laughing at the airs of superior worldly wisdom which the young actress gave herself, revealing in the assumption the charming simplicity of her character.

They walked down one of the long avenues and crossed over into Hyde Park. The Row was very full at this time; and the brightness of the day seemed to have awoke an artificial briskness among the melancholy men and plethoric girls who had come out for their forced exercise.

"I have been in nearly every capital in Europe," said Will to his companion, "and I have never seen such a company of handsome men and women as you may see here almost any day. And I never saw anywhere people out to enjoy themselves looking so intensely sad over it."

"These are my employers," said Miss Brunel with a smile on her pale, dark face. "These are the people who pay me to amuse them."

"Look at this big, heavy man coming up now," said Will. "Look how he bobs in

his saddle: one doesn't often see such a—— Why, it is——"

"Count Schönstein," said Miss Brunel.

It was. And as the Count came up and saw Will walking by the side of a closely veiled and gracefully dressed young lady, he took off his hat in his finest manner, and was about to ride on. Perhaps it was the luxuriant black hair, or the graceful figure, of the young girl which made him pause for a second, and recognise her. At all events, he no sooner saw who she was than he stopped his horse, clumsily got down from the saddle, and drawing the reins over the animal's head, came forward to the railing.

"The very two people whom I wished to see," he observed with a pompous magnanimity. (Indeed there were several reasons why he was glad just then to observe that Annie Brunel had taken kindly to the young man whom he had introduced to her.) "Do

you know, Miss Brunel, that Melton is going to close his theatre for a month?"

"Yes."

"Could anything be more opportune? Now listen to what I have to propose. You want a good holiday in this fine weather. Very well. I must go over to Schönstein at once to see about some alterations and improvements I want made; and I propose to make it worth Mr. Anerley's while to go with me and superintend part of these improvements. That is an affair of necessity and business on my part and his; but why should you and Mrs. Christmas not accept our convoy over there? Even if you only go as far as one of the Rhine villages, we could see you safely that distance. Or if I could persuade you to come and see my place, such as it is—for a week or two. I think the excursion would be delightful; and if I can't entertain you as sumptuously as a

king, yet I wont starve you, and I'll give you the best wine to be bought for good money in Baden."

Will coloured up at the hideous barbarity of the closing sentence; but Miss Brunel answered good-naturedly:

"You're very kind indeed, Count; and I am sure the wine must be a great inducement to Mr. Anerley. But if I go anywhere for a holiday, it will be for Mrs. Christmas' sake; and I must see what she says about it first."

"Oh, if it is Mrs. Christmas," said the Count with a laugh, "I must try to persuade her."

"No; I wont have any coercion. I will place the matter before her in all its details, and she shall decide. If we don't go, I hope you'll have a pleasant journey all the same."

"And as for you, Anerley, what do you say?"

"As our arrangement will be a business matter, we'll settle it another time," said Will in a decided tone, which prevented the Count making further reference to buying and selling.

"I wont take any denial from any one of you," said the Count, with a prodigious laugh. "As for Mrs. Christmas, if that little woman dares to thwart me, I'll have her portrait published in the *Illustrated London News* as the wife of Rip van Winkle."

With which astounding witticism, the Count proceeded to get on horseback again —a rather difficult matter. Will held the stirrup for him, however; and eventually he shook himself into the saddle.

Annie Brunel had lifted her veil to speak to the Count; and as her companion now saw that there was a good deal of whispering and nodding going on among several knots

of riders, he thought it prudent to withdraw himself and her into the Park. From thence they took their way back through Kensington Gardens, and so home.

"Would it look strange in English eyes," asked Miss Brunel, frankly, "if Mrs. Christmas and I in travelling about were to visit the Count's place?"

"I don't think so," said Will. "And if it did, it wouldn't matter. I think the party would be a very merry and pleasant one; and you would not allow Mrs. Christmas to feel that for her sake you were moping alone in some dull sea-side lodgings. The Count is really very good-natured and kind; and I think you would enjoy the quaint old people and their manners down in the Black Forest."

"Have you been there?"

"Oh, yes. I have had a passing glance at every place, pretty nearly. There you

may have a little deer-shooting, if you like: I have seen two ladies go out with guns, though they never did anything beyond letting one of the guns fall and nearly killing a keeper."

"Will it be very expensive going over?" she asked quite naïvely, as though she had been calculating the propriety of accepting a country engagement.

"Not at all. Are you going to say yes?"

"If Mrs. Christmas does, I will."

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD-BYE.

"CRAS ingens iterabimus æquor; do you know what that means, Dove?" asked Will.

"Something dreadful, I suppose," she said.

"*Cras*, on Monday night, *iterabimus*, I must leave, *ingens æquor*, for Germany. Didn't I say I should never leave England again without you, Dove? But this is only for a week or two, my darling; and it is on business; and I am come to crave your forgiveness and permission."

What did she say? Not one word. But, being seated at the piano just then, and

having some knowledge of how she could most easily reach her lover's heart and make him sorry for his fickleness, she began to play, with great tenderness, with graceful and touching chords, that weird, wild, cruel air, "The Coulin," — the old Irish air that seems to have in it all the love and agony of parting which mankind has ever experienced. It is only now and again that humanity has expressed its pain or passion in one of those strong, audible throbs—as when, for instance, God put the *Marseillaise* into the bursting heart of Rouget de Lille. One wonders how men live after writing such things.

And as for Will, he never could bear the "Coulin;" he put his hand on her shoulder, and said—

"Don't play that any more, Dove. That isn't the parting of love at all—it is the parting of death."

"Ah, why should you say that?" she said, rising and creeping close to him, with tears suddenly starting to her eyes. "Why should you say that, Will? You don't expect us to be parted *that* way?"

"Come," he said, leading her out of the drawing-room into the open air. "The man who wrote the 'Coulin' had probably a broken heart; but that is no reason why we should break ours over his misery. My father is teaching Carry and Totty to fish for sticklebacks in the pond; shall we go and help them?"

He had gone down to bid good-bye to St. Mary-Kirby and its people. The warm valley was very tempting at this time; but did not peremptory business call him away? For after the first yellow flush of the buttercups had died out of the meadows, they were growing white with the snow of the ox-eye; and the walnut trees were changing

from brown to green; and instead of the lilacs, the bushy, red-budded honeysuckle was opening and burdening the air with its perfume.

Then they had fine weather just then; would it be finer on the Rhine? The white heat of mid-day was without haze. Sharp and clear were the white houses, specks only, on the far uplands; the fir-woods lay black against the blinding sky; and down here in the valley the long-grassed meadows seemed to grow dark in the heat, though there was a light shimmering of sunny green surrounding like a halo each pollard willow by the river-side. In the clear pools the grey trout threw black shadows on the sand beneath, and lay motionless, with their eyes watching your every movement on the bank. St. Mary-Kirby lay hot and white among the green meadows and by the side of the cool stream; but the people of St. Mary-

Kirby prayed for rain to swell the fruit of their orchards and fields.

On their way down to a little gate which, at one end of Mr. Anerley's garden, allowed you to go out upon a small bank overlooking the pond, Will explained to his companion the necessity for his going abroad, the probabilities of his stay, and so forth. She knew that he was going with Count Schönstein; but she did not know that Annie Brunel was to be of the party. Will had no particular reason for not mentioning the circumstance; but as he strictly confined himself to the business aspect of the case, Miss Brunel was somehow omitted.

Nor, when they arrived at the pond, and found Mr. Anerley superintending the operations of two young anglers, did he consider it necessary to tell his father that Annie Brunel was going with them. Perhaps she had slipped out of his mind altogether. Per-

haps he fancied he had no right to reveal the Count's private arrangements. At all events, Miss Brunel's name was not at that time mentioned.

"The stickleback," observed Mr. Anerley, sententiously, when they drew near, "must be of very ancient lineage. Any long-continued necessity on the part of any animal produces a corresponding organ or function; can you explain to me, therefore, why Scotchmen are not born with a Mackintosh?"

"No," said Dove.

"Because Nature has not had time to develop it. You observe that my stickleback here, whom I have just caught, has had time to acquire special means of defence and attack. I, a man, can only clumsily use for defence or attack, limbs which are properly adapted for other purposes——"

"Which proves that mankind has never experienced the necessity of having specially

destructive organs," said Will, to Dove's great delight.

She knew not which, if either, was right; but the philosopher of Chesnut Bank had such a habit of inflicting upon his womankind theories which they did not understand, and could not contradict, that she had a malicious pleasure in witnessing what she supposed was his discomfiture.

"It serves you right, papa," she said. "You presume on our ignorance, when you have only mamma and me. Now you have somebody to talk to you in your own way."

"When I observed," continued Mr. Anerley, "that mankind had no special organ of attack and defence, I ought to have excluded women. The tongue of woman, an educational result which owes its origin to——"

"Don't let him go on, Dove," said Will, "or he'll say something very wicked."

"Has papa been talking nonsense to you all day, Carry?" asked Dove.

"No," said the matter-of-fact Carry, "it was the story of the 'King of the White Bears.'"

"I pghesumed on theigh ignoghance," said Mr. Anerley, mimicking his adopted daughter's pronunciation.

"We must give him up, Dove," said Will. "A man who will employ ridicule in a scientific argument is not worth answering. If he were not my father, I should express my feelings more strongly; as it is——"

Here Mrs. Anerley appeared, her pretty, kindly face lit up by some unusual and pleasurable excitement. She was almost out of breath too.

"Hubert, do you know what's going to happen?"

"Never having been able, my dear, to calculate the probable line of *your* actions——"

"Be quiet. The Bishop is coming to open the church, when the alterations are complete. And, Mrs. Bexley says, that as their house is so far off, he will lunch with us."

"Dear me!" observed Mr. Anerley, "a bishop! I shall become quite respectable. What sort of wine will the exalted creature propose to drink—if a bishop drinks at all?"

"There will be several clergymen, you know, and——"

"With a bishop in the house, shall I be able to see any lesser lights? I shall allow you women to sit down in the chair he has used, as you all do when the Prince of Wales appears in public. There is a Hindoo custom resembling this—not wholly a religious observance, you know——"

Mr. Anerley stopped, perhaps luckily; pretending to have a dreadful struggle with an obstinate stickleback.

"Mr. Bexley is charmed with the embroidery that Dove has done for the altar-cloth," continued Mrs. Anerley; "and even poor old Mr. Ribston came hobbling up to me and said 'as it was werry nice indeed, only, ma'am, I should ha' preferred it without the bits o' red, which is the mark of the Scarlet Woman. Not as I mean,' he said, though, 'that either you, ma'am, or Mrs. Bexley, would turn us into Papishes, without our knowin' of it; only there's some games up as I hear of, and one has to be p'tickler and not be mixed up wi' them as is ruinin' the Church!"

"Very proper, too," said Mr. Anerley, having arranged the stickleback question. "I should think that old Ribston fancied he had hit you and Dove pretty hard there. Would you think Dove was a pupil of the Scarlet Woman, Carry?"

"Who is the Scarlet Woman?" said

Carry, with her big brown eyes staring.

"Mother Redcap," said Mr. Anerley. "A relation of the old woman who lived in a shoe."

"Hubert," said Mrs. Anerley, sharply, "you may teach the children stickleback fishing; but you'd better leave other things alone. You may be pulling down more than you can build up again, as Mr. Ribston said about these old pillars in the nave."

"Mr. Ribston, my dear, is not a reflective man. He laments the destruction of anything old, not seeing that as we destroy antiquities, so the years are making other antiquities. Mamma, box that girl's ears! she is laughing at me."

In the evening Will had to walk over to Balnacluith Place, in order to complete the arrangements with the Count as to their starting on the Monday evening. Dove

went with him; and when they got there the red sunset was flaring over the gloomy old house, and lighting up its windows with streaks of fire. Here and there, too, the tall bare trunks of one or two Scotch firs turned scarlet against the faint grey-green of the east; and the smooth river had broad splashes of crimson upon it, as it lay down there among the cool meadows, apparently motionless.

Will's reticence was unfortunate. They had scarcely begun to talk about their journey when Count Schönstein mentioned something about Miss Brunel's probable arrangements.

"Is Miss Brunel going with you?" said Dove, her soft eyes lighting up with a faint surprise.

"Yes. Didn't you know?" replied Count Schönstein. "She is going to take a short holiday, and we hope to be honoured by her presence at Schönstein."

Dove looked at Will; he was examining a cartridge-pouch the Count had brought in, and did not observe her inquiring glance.

On their way home, he observed that she was very quiet. At first he thought she was subdued by the exceeding beauty of the twilight, which had here and there a yellow star lying lambent in the pale grey; or that she was listening to the strong, luscious music of the nightingales, which abound in the valley of St. Mary-Kirby. Presently, however, he saw that she was wilfully silent, and then he asked her what had displeased her. Her sense of wrong was of that tremulous and tender character which never reached the length of indignation; and just now, when she wanted to be very angry with him, she merely said, not in a very firm voice—

"I did not think you would deceive me, Will."

"Well, now," he said, "you have been wasting all this beautiful time and annoying yourself by nursing your grievance silently. Why didn't you speak out at once, Dove; and say how I have deceived you?"

"You said you were going abroad on business."

"So I am."

"Count Schönstein talks as if it were merely a pleasure excursion."

"So it is, to him."

"Miss Brunel is going with you."

"Well?"

"You know quite well what I mean," she said, petulantly. "Why didn't you tell me she was going with you? Why did you conceal her going from me, as if there was no confidence between us——"

"My darling, I didn't conceal her going from you. I didn't tell you, because her

going was no business of mine—because—because——"

"Because you thought I would be jealous," she said, with a little wilful colour in her face.

"My darling," said Will, gravely, "you don't consider what you're saying. You wrong Annie Brunel quite as much as you wrong me and yourself. I don't know what you've seen in her to warrant your supposing for an instant that——"

"Oh, Will, Will," she cried, passionately, imploringly, "don't talk like that to me, or you'll break my heart. Be friends with me, Will—dear Will—for if I'm not friends with you, what's the use of living? And I'm very sorry, Will; and I didn't mean it; but all the same you should have told me, *and I hate her!*"

"Now you are yourself, Dove," he said, laughing. "And if Miss Brunel were

here just now, you would fling your arms round her neck, and beg her to forgive you——"

"I am never going to fling my arms round any person's neck," said Dove, "except, perhaps, one person—that is, when the person deserves it—but I don't think he ever will; and as for Miss Brunel, I don't know what business she has going abroad just now, and I don't know why I should be so fond of her, although I hate her quite the same; and if she were here just now, as you say, I would tell her she ought to be ashamed of herself, cheating people into liking her."

"You talk very prettily, Dove; but with a touch of incoherence. You ought to hear how Annie Brunel speaks of *you;* and you ought to know what a kindly, tender, almost motherly interest she has in you.

"Then you have seen her lately?" said Dove, peeping up.

"Yes, once or twice."

"Does she know that we are to be married?" asked Dove, looking down again.

"She knows that we are to be magghied. You foolish little darling, she saw it in your face the moment you met her; and you might have seen that she knew your secret."

"Actresses are witches, dear," said Dove, gravely. "They know everything."

"They are like witches in having suffered a good deal of persecution at the hands of the ignorant and vulgar."

"Is that me, dear?" she asked, demurely. "No, then, I shan't make fun any more. But if you're really going away on Monday evening, Will, I want to bid you good-bye

to-night—and not before all the people, you know; and I'll tell you all that you have got to do when you are away in thinking about me. There's the moon getting up now behind Woodhill Church; and every night at ten, Will, all the time you are away, I'll go up to my room and look up at her, and you'll do the same, darling, wont you, just to please me? And then I'll know that my Will is thinking of me, and of St. Mary-Kirby; and then you'll know, darling, that I'm thinking of you, and if I could only send a kiss over to you, I'd do it. It wont be much trouble to you, will it? And if I'm lonely and miserable all the day, and if the 'Coulin,' that I can't help playing sometimes, makes me cry, I shall know that at ten you and I will be able to speak to each other that way——"

"I'll do everything you ask me," said

Will to her, gently; "but—but don't play the 'Coulin' any more, Dove."

"Why, dear? Ah, you said it was the parting of death. Why did you say that?"

CHAPTER XIII.

"MIT DEINEN SCHÖNEN AUGEN."

WELL, the first time Will fulfilled his promise to Dove was when he, and Annie Brunel, Mrs. Christmas and the Count (Hermann and another of the Count's servants being in another carriage) were rolling southwards in the Dover express. Here and there he caught a glimpse of the moon, as it loomed suddenly and nearly over the top of some tall embankment; but somehow his attention was so much taken up by the young girl opposite him, that Dove and her pretty request were in danger of being forgotten.

Besides themselves there was only a young Frenchman in the carriage—a grave, handsome young man, with melancholy black eyes and a carefully waxed moustache—who sate and covertly stared at Miss Brunel all the way. Perhaps he had seen her in the theatre; but in any case the beautiful, clear, dark artist-face of the young actress, with its large deep eyes, was quite sufficient to imbue a susceptible young Frenchman with a vague sadness. Fortunately, she dropped a glove; and he, having picked it up and handed it to her with a grave and earnest politeness, leant back in his seat, apparently thrilled with a secret happiness.

The little party was in very good spirits; and Annie Brunel was especially bright and cheerful in her subdued, motherly way. Will suddenly found himself released from the irritating pleasure of having to humour the whims, and coax the moods of an almost

childish, petulant, pretty and engaging girl; and talking instead with one who seemed to have a gift of beautifying and ennobling everything of which she spoke. Whatever she mentioned, indeed, acquired a new importance in his eyes. He had never discovered so many things of which he would like to know more; he had never discovered that the things he did know, and the places he had seen, and the people he had met, were so full of life, and colour, and dramatic interest.

"You two people talk like children going off for holidays," said the Count, disentangling himself from a series of discursive theatrical reminiscences offered him by Mrs. Christmas.

"So we are," said Annie Brunel.

The Count introduced himself into the conversation; and then the colour and light seemed to Will to die out of it. The fact

was, Count Schönstein was very much pleased to see that Miss Brunel took so kindly to his friend, as it rendered his own relations with her more secure. He was very grateful to Will, also, for coming with him on this particular excursion; knowing thoroughly that he could never have induced Mrs. Christmas and Miss Brunel to go with him alone. These considerations were well enough in their way; but at the same time he did not think it quite fair that Will should have all the pleasure of Miss Brunel's society to himself. To be shut out from their conversation not only annoyed him, but made him feel old. As it was, Miss Brunel had a provoking habit of speaking to him as if he really were old, and only capable of affording her information. Worst of all, she sometimes inadvertently spoke of herself and Will as "we;" and referred to the Count as if he were some third party,

whom the two young people were good enough to patronize.

"But then," said the Count to himself, "she has not seen Schönstein. Anerley is perhaps a more suitable companion for her; but then she knows that he has no money, and that he has already mated himself. Once I have shown her Schönstein, I shall be able to dispense with *his* services: she will need no further inducement. And I never should have had the chance of showing her Schönstein, but for him."

The night was so fine that they all remained on deck during the short passage over to Calais; walking up and down in the pale moonlight, that lay along the sea and touched the great black funnels and the tall, smooth masts and yards. Looking down upon the deck beneath, Will had seen Hermann tenderly wrap up the fat little English

girl who was to be Miss Brunel's maid, and who was very melancholy indeed over parting with her mother, the Count's Kentish housekeeper; and then the stalwart keeper went forward to the bow and smoked cheap cigars fiercely for the rest of the voyage, thinking probably of the old companions he was going to see.

The Count was very quiet. He scarcely spoke. He sate down and wrapped himself up in his great Viennese travelling-coat; allowing Will and Miss Brunel to promenade all the deck. It was simply impossible for any one to become sick on such a night; but I do not think the Count considered himself quite safe, until he stood, tall, stout, and pompous, on Calais pier.

"You are a good sailor, I suppose, Anerley," he said, grandly. "I do think it ridiculous when a man can't cross the Channel without becoming sick."

"A man would have to try very hard to be sick to-night. Hermann, you speak French, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the tall keeper, as he bundled the trembling Polly up the gangway, and then began to look out for such articles of his master's luggage as had not been booked to Cologne.

They were going the Rhine way, instead of *viâ* Paris and Strasbourg; and so in due time they found themselves in the Brussels and Cologne train. We have at present nothing to do with their journey, or any incident of it, except that which befel two of the party that evening in a commonplace hotel overlooking the Rhine.

Romance in a Rhine hotel! exclaims the reader; and I submit to the implied indignation of the protest.

Perhaps the first time you saw the Rhine, you thought romance possible. Perhaps

you went round that way on your wedding trip; but in any case the man who lingers about the noble river, and hides himself away from hasty tourists in some little village, and finds himself for the first time in the dreamland of the German ballad-singers, with a faint legendary mist still hanging about the brown ruins, and with a mystic glamour of witchcraft touching the green islands and the dark hills, may forget the guide-books and grow to love the Rhine. Then let him never afterwards use the river as a highway. The eight or ten hours of perspiring Cockney—the odour of cooking—the exclamations and chatter—the parasol-and-smelling-bottle element which one cannot help associating with the one day's journey up or down the Rhine, is a nightmare for after years. One should never visit the Rhine twice; unless one has plenty of time, no companions, an intimacy with Ger-

man songs, a liking for Rüdesheimer, a stock of English cigars, and a thorough contempt for practical English energy.

Yet it was the Rhine did all the mischief that night. Imagine for a moment the position. They had arrived in Cologne somewhere about five in the afternoon, and had driven to the —— hotel, which, as everybody knows, overlooks the river. Then they had dined. Then they had walked round to the Cathedral; where the Count proudly contributed a single Friedrich towards helping King William in his efforts to complete the building. Then they had gone to one of the shops opposite, where the Count, in purchasing some photographs, insisted on talking German to a man who knew English thoroughly. Then he had stalked into Jean Marie Farina's place at the corner, and brought out one of Farina's largest bottles for Miss Brunel; he carrying it down

to the hotel, the observant towns-people turning and staring at the big Englishman. By this time the sun had gone down, the twilight was growing darker, the faint lights of the city beginning to tell through the grey.

There were gardens, said the porter, at the top of the hotel—beautiful gardens, looking down on the river: if the gentlemen wished to smoke, wine could be carried up.

"No," said the Count. "I shall commit the rudeness of going off to my room. I did not sleep, like you people, in the train."

So he bade them good-night and disappeared.

"But we ought to go up and see the gardens," said Annie Brunel.

"I think so," said Will. "Mrs. Christmas, will you take my arm? it is a long climb. And now that you have surrendered

yourself to my care, may I recommend a luxury peculiar to the place? One ought never to sit in Rhine gardens without sparkling Muscatel, seltzer-water, and ice, to be drank out of frosted champagne-glasses, in the open air, with flowers around us, and the river below——"

"You anticipate," said Miss Brunel. "Perhaps the gardens are only a smoking-room, filled with people."

The "gardens" turned out to be a long and spacious balcony, not projecting from the building, but formed out of the upper floor. There were tables and chairs about; and a raised seat which ran along the entire front. The pillars supporting the roof were wound round with trailing evergreens, the tendrils and leaves of which scarcely stirred in the cool night-air: finally, the place was quite empty.

Annie Brunel stepped over to the front of

the balcony, and looked down; then a little cry of surprise and delight escaped her.

"Come," she said to Mrs. Christmas, "come over here; it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

Beautiful enough it was—far too beautiful to be put down here in words. The moon had arisen by this time—the yellow moon of the Rhine—and it had come up and over the vague brown shadows of Deutz until it hung above the river. Where it touched the water there was a broad lane of broken, rippling silver; but all the rest of the wide, and silent stream was of a dull olive hue, on which (looking from this great height) you saw the sharp black hulls of the boats. Then far along the opposite bank, and across the bridges, and down on the quays underneath were glittering beads of orange fire; and on the river there were other lights —moving crimson and green spots which

marked the lazy barges and the steamers out there. When one of the boats came slowly up, the olive-green plain was cleft in two, and you saw waving lines of silver widening out to the bank on either side; then the throb of the paddle and the roar of the steam ceased, a green lamp was run up to the mast-head, to beam up there like a fire-fly; the olive river grew smooth and silent again; and the perfect, breathless peace of the night was unbroken. A clear, transparent night, without darkness; and yet these points of orange, and green, and scarlet burned sharply; and the soft moonlight on the river shone whiter than phosphorus. So still a night, too, that the voices on the quays floated up to this high balcony—vague, echo-like, undistinguishable.

Annie Brunel was too much impressed by the singular loveliness of the night and of

the picture before her to say anything. She sate up on the raised bench; and looking out from between the pillars, Will could see her figure framed, as it were, by the surrounding leaves. Against the clear, dark sky her head was softly defined, and her face caught a pale tinge of the moonlight as she sate quite still and seemed to listen.

He forgot all about the iced wine and his cigar. He forgot even Mrs. Christmas, who sate in the shadow of one of the pillars, and also looked down on the broad panorama before her.

Then Miss Brunel began to talk to him; and it seemed to him that her voice was unusually low, and sad, and tender. It may have been the melancholy of the place —for all very beautiful things haunt us and torture us with a vague, wistful longing— or it may be that some old recollections had been awakened within her; but she spoke

to him with a frank, close, touching confidence, such as he had never seen her exhibit to any one. Nor was he aware of the manner in which he reciprocated these confidences; nor of the dangerous simplicity of many things he said to her—suggestions which she was too much pre-occupied to notice. But even in such rare moments as these, when we seem to throw off the cold attitudinizing of life and speak direct to each other, heart to heart, a double mental process is possible, and we may be unconsciously shaping our wishes in accordance with those too exalted sentiments born of incautious speech. And Will went on in this fashion. The past was past; let no harm be said of it; and yet it had been unsatisfactory to him. There had been no generous warmth in it; no passionate glow; only the vague commonplaces of pleasure, which left no

throb of regret behind them. And now he felt within him a capacity, a desire, for a fuller and richer life—a new, fresh, hopeful life, with undreamed of emotions and sensations. Why should he not leave England for ever? What was England to him? With only one companion, who had aspirations like his own, who could receive his confidences, who might love with a passion strong as that he knew lay latent in his own heart, who had these divine, supreme sympathies—

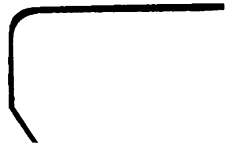
He was looking up at the beautiful face of the young girl, cold and clear-cut like marble, in the moonlight; and he was not aware that he had been thinking of her. All at once that horrible consciousness flashed in upon him like a bolt of consuming fire; his heart gave one big throb, and he almost staggered back as he said to himself, with remorse, and horror, and shame—

"O God, I love this woman with my whole soul; and what shall I say to my poor Dove?"

She sate up there, pure and calm, like some glorified saint, and saw nothing of the hell of contending emotions which raged below in her companion's breast. Unconscious of it all, she sate and dreamed the dreams of a happy and contented soul. As for him, he was overwhelmed with shame, and pity, and despair. And as he thought of Dove, and St. Mary-Kirby, the dull, sonorous striking of some great bell suddenly reminded him of his promise.

He hastily pulled out his watch—half-past ten, English time. She, down in the quiet Kentish vale, had remembered his promise (indeed, had she not dreamed of it all day?)—had gone to her window, and tenderly thought of her lover, and with happy tears in her eyes, had sent him many

a kindly message across the sea; *he*—what his thoughts had been at the same moment he scarcely dared confess to his awakened self.

END OF VOL. I.

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